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Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona

Moshe Idel

Introduction

In a lecture delivered many years ago in Barcelona I began a preliminary survey of the history of the Kabbalah in that city. There I emphasized the transition of Kabbalistic traditions from Gerona to Barcelona and what seemed to me to be the characteristics of the Kabbalah in Barcelona, namely the development of the main type of esoteric Kabbalah among the followers of Nahmanides. This can be described as the a theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah which was cultivated by a group of Kabbalists active between, roughly speaking, the years 1270 and 1330. I would describe this group of Kabbalists as centripetal or nomian, from the Jewish traditional point of view, given the emphasis it laid on the centrality of the Torah and the commandments as understood in Rabbinic literature. In this lecture I also pointed out the emergence of another and much less visible Kabbalistic school, the ecstatic one, in Barcelona around the year 1270 and drew attention to the differences between them.¹ I would designate Avraham Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah, as well as that of R. Barukh Togarmi and the young R. Yosef Gikatilla, as part of the more centrifugal and anomian forms of Kabbalah, to judge from the point of view of the importance of the commandments in his Kabbalistic system.

In the fifteen years that have passed since that lecture, many scholars have turned their attention to topics related to Catalan Kabbalah, including many aspects of Kabbalah in Barcelona, and much has been printed in a variety of languages.²

- 1 That lecture has been translated into Catalan. See Moshe Idel, 'La història de la cabala a Barcelona', in *La Cabala*, Barcelona 1989, pp. 59–74. For a longer English version see 'The Vicissitudes of Kabbalah in Catalonia', in M. Lazar & S. Haliczer eds., *The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492*, Lancaster, Calif. 1997, pp. 25–40.
- 2 See, e.g., the most outstanding contributions by Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides, Cyclical Time and Holy Text*, Tel Aviv 2003 (Hebrew); Elliot R. Wolfson, 'By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic', *AJS Review* 14, 2 (1989), pp. 103–178; Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity & Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century*, Leiden 2000; Dov Schwartz, 'From Theurgy to Magic: The Evolution of the Magical-Talismanic Justification of Sacrifice in the Circle of Nahmanides and his Interpreters', *Aleph* 1 (2000), pp. 165–213, reprinted in his *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Leiden 2005, pp. 56–90; Daniel Abrams, 'Orality in the Kabbalistic School of Nahmanides: Preserving and Interpreting

Meanwhile, I have continued to investigate the different trends of Kabbalah in Barcelona, and have published several articles in which I elaborated upon issues which I touched only *en passant* in that first article, such as the clash between the two schools that took place in the late eighties of the 13th century.³ It is not my intention here to summarize my earlier studies or those of other scholars, but rather to focus attention upon a topic that has not drawn due attention in scholarship: the role played by Ashkenazi Kabbalists who transmitted to Kabbalists in Barcelona esoteric issues found mainly in the literature related to the Qalonymite family.⁴ Though this issue is not considered to be central for the general history of Kabbalah in Barcelona, it nevertheless constitutes a significant topic that deserves separate treatment. I hope that the material discussed below will contribute to the understanding of the history of the Kabbalah in Barcelona specifically. I shall attempt, at the end of this study, to succinctly put those developments in the wider context of the intellectual history of this esoteric lore in general.

While Barcelona is the specific geographical area that will serve as the description of the place to which Ashkenazi esoterica arrived in the second half of the 13th century, the definition of “Ashkenazi” in our specific context is less clear. I propose to deal below basically with what I consider to be esoteric traditions in southern Germany (and few of them in central Germany), mainly those related to

Esoteric Traditions and Texts’, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995), pp. 85–102; Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: The Secret and its Boundaries in Medieval Jewish Tradition*, Jerusalem 2001 (Hebrew) and his *By Way of Truth, Nahmanides and the Creation of Tradition*, Jerusalem 2006 (Hebrew) and Carmi Horowitz, *The Jewish Sermon in 14th Century Spain: The Derashot of R. Joshua Ibn Shu’eib*, Cambridge, Mass. and London 1989.

- 3 See, e.g., Idel, ‘Nachmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah and Spiritual Leadership’, M. Idel and M. Ostow eds., *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership*, Northvale 1998, pp. 15–96; idem, ‘Nishmat Eloha: On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His Schools’, in S. Arzy, M. Fachler, B. Kahana eds., *Life as a Midrash, Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, Tel Aviv 2004, pp. 338–380 (Hebrew); ‘Leviathan and Its Consort: From Talmudic to Kabbalistic Myth’, in Ithamar Gruenwald and Moshe Idel eds., *Myths in Judaism: History, Thought, Literature*, Jerusalem 2004, pp. 145–187 (Hebrew) and ‘The Secret of Impregnation as Metempsychosis in Kabbalah’, A. and J. Assmann eds., *Verwandlungen, Archaeologie der literarischen Communication*, IX, Munchen 2006, pp. 341–366. In more general terms see my survey of Kabbalah in Sefarad in the period under scrutiny here also in ‘The Kabbalah’s Window of Opportunities’, 1270–1290’, E. Fleisher, G. Blidstein, C. Horowitz, B. Septimus eds., *Me’ah She’arim, Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 171–208.
- 4 For a survey of the relations between Ashkenazi and Spanish Jews in the Middle Ages see Avraham Grossman, in Haim Beinart ed., *The Sephardi Legacy*, Jerusalem 1992, vol. 1, pp. 220–238.

the family of R. Qalonimus from Luca. I will exclude the esoteric writings of the circle known in scholarship as the literature of the so-called “Special Cherub”, since I assume that this is not only a school differing in its conceptual point of view from the Qalonymite one, but also one that was active in Northern France and not in Germany.⁵ Though the emphasis below will be on the circulation of certain themes and approaches to esotericism, it is also important to try to identify the transmitters of those traditions. All the cases discussed below are of Ashkenazi figures who made their way to Catalonia. This does not mean that all of them emerged in Ashkenaz, and there is room to assume that some of them arrived in Germany from elsewhere, probably from Italy and ultimately from the Orient.⁶ However, since the existence of these themes is demonstrated by documents extant in German territories, I resort below to the term “Ashkenazi”. It is not my intention below to show that a tradition is more authentic if transmitted by Ashkenazi masters.

My main intention here is to survey certain aspects of the intellectual market in Barcelona in the second half of the 13th century. It would appear that this city was a most interesting place where numerous encounters took place between many different Christian spiritual trends, such as Joachimists, Franciscans and Cathars on the one hand, and different Jewish currents, especially those related to occult

5 See the view advocated by Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, Jerusalem 1968, who correctly distinguished between the two schools from the conceptual point of view but did not separate them from the geographical point of view. See also his ‘The Ashkenazi Hasidic “Gates of Wisdom”’ G. Nahon and Ch. Touati eds., *Hommages a Georges Vajda*, Louvain 1980, pp. 183–199, and his more recent monograph *The ‘Unique Cherub’ Circle. A School of Jewish Mystics and Esoterics in Medieval Germany*, Tübingen 1999. On the need for a geographical separation between the two see Moshe Idel, *Golem; Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid*, Albany 1990, pp. 54–95. I propose to distinguish between the Qalonymite school on the one hand, and the numerous writings of R. Neḥemiah ben Shelomo the Prophet, active in Erfurt, on the other hand, but see in all those writings Ashkenazi esotericism. See Moshe Idel, ‘On R. Neḥemiah ben Shelomo the Prophet’s Commentaries on the Name of Forty-Two and *Sefer ha-Hokhmah* Attributed to R. Eleazar of Worms’, *Kabbalah*, 14 (2006), pp. 157–261 (Hebrew); idem, ‘From Italy to Germany and Back, On the Circulation of Jewish Esoteric Traditions’, *Kabbalah* 14 (2006), pp. 47–94 and ‘Some forlorn writings of a forgotten Ashkenazi prophet; R. Neḥemiah ben Shelomo ha-Navi’, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95,1 (2005), pp. 183–196. It should be pointed out that while the testimonies to be discussed below quite plausibly stem from the Ashkenazi circles mentioned above, I did not find evidence for an acquaintance with the literature related to the Special Cherub. This fact too seems to confirm my distinction between the two circles as related to two different geographical centers.

6 See Idel, ‘From Italy to Germany and Back’.

knowledge, on the other hand. At least with regard to Jewish multiculturalism, Barcelona in this period is comparable, to a great extent, only to the multicultural atmosphere of contemporary Toledo and Rome. I shall be concerned below basically with the post-Nahmanides' Barcelona and the spiritual scene in the aftermath of the famous dispute in the city.⁷ This is part of a more comprehensive approach I attempt to advance: the understanding of major developments in Jewish culture not just as a matter of geniuses discovering novel insights (events that happen and may be important), in the vein of Romantic scholarship, or the history of abstract ideas copied, sometimes with changes, from one book to another, but also from a broader point of view of intellectual history and cultural history, by paying attention to what books, trends and individuals were found separately or together in a certain center and especially to the way in which they interacted. Thus, issues like controversies, mobility of itinerant scholars, trajectories, transmissions or distortions and interactions between different Jewish elites, and between Jewish and non-Jewish cultural centers, should stand much more at the center of scholarship. Multiple and divergent contexts should be presupposed for itinerant scholars who brought with them information from so many other centers. It is interesting to point out that Jewish centers of culture were often the great European cities, in varying stages of development, where new forms of knowledge emerged or were translated from other languages. Many of the processes that constituted European culture had an impact on Kabbalah too or contributed to its emergence and development.⁸ The various forms of Kabbalah were an urban type of knowledge which developed as part of complex processes of competition, rejection, absorption and adaptation of a variety of forms of learning: religious, astrological and philosophical.⁹ This does not mean that there were no earlier Jewish concepts in the background which

7 See Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon 1217–1327*, London 1997; Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond, The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath*, Berkeley 1992, and Jean Régéné, *History of the Jews in Aragon, Regesta and Documents 1213–1327*, Jerusalem 1978.

8 See, e.g., my 'On European Cultural Renaissances and Jewish Mysticism', *Kabbalah*, 13 (2005), pp. 43–78; 'On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah', *Kabbalah*, 3 (1998), pp. 145–176, or 'Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: Toward an Interactive History of Sixteenth Century Kabbalah', in eds. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri, *Cultural Intermediaries, Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 239–269. For the importance of transmission in Kabbalah see my 'Transmission in the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah', in eds. Y. Elman and I. Gershoni, *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, New Haven, London 2000, pp. 138–164 and Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Beyond the Spoken Word: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Medieval Jewish Mysticism', *ibidem*, pp. 166–204.

9 Idel, 'On Some Forms of Order in Kabbalah', *Da'at* 50–52 (2003), pp. xxxi–lviii. On the distinction between urban versus rural forms of Jewish mysticism, specifically

served as the bases for those processes,¹⁰ or that other forms of religious literature, like Sufism, did not contribute to Kabbalah.¹¹ Here, however, I would like to draw attention to the existence of several testimonies related to Ashkenazi esotericism and authors in Barcelona which have not been collected by scholars, and which may testify to the conspicuous impact of a certain type of esotericism.

In order to prevent misunderstandings it must be emphasized that the following discussions reveal few examples of the penetration of Ashkenazi esoterica to Catalonia and its possible impact on some different forms of Kabbalah that emerged there in the second half of the 13th century. Their great importance is evident in the case of ecstatic Kabbalah, significant for R. Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi's opus, and less so for the structure of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah as formulated in Nahmanides' school in Barcelona. They represent solid evidence for acquaintance with Ashkenazi material in this city, and should be taken in consideration when attempting to survey the sources of Kabbalah in general and in Catalonia in particular.

Late 13th century Barcelona, like its contemporary Toledo and Rome, was a dynamic place in which different intellectual figures and a variety of writings intersected. There were eminent Halakhic figures, Kabbalists, and writers of moralistic books. Many fewer authors were strongly inclined to philosophy. The most significant one I am acquainted with, R. Zerahiah ben Shealtiel Hen (Gracian) of Barcelona, left the city for Rome and his critique of the manner in which the *Guide* had been understood contributes some information to our

Kabbalah versus some aspects of 18th century Hasidism, see Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, Budapest 2005.

- 10 See in general my approach in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven 1988, and more recently my *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, New Haven 2002, pp. 239–245.
- 11 For translations of a passage found in one of the books of Al-Ghazzali dealing with Sufism, done in Barcelona early in the 13th century see idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany 1988, pp. 106–107, and for the possible impact of Sufi imagery on Geronese Kabbalah see Haviva Pedaya, 'Aḥuzim be-Dibbur: For the Clarification of a Prophetic-Ecstatic Type in Early Kabbalah', in her collection of essays *Vision and Speech, Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles 2002, pp. 137–207 (Hebrew). It should be mentioned that for the time being, I have not found a single example of the quotation of a specific Sufi text in Kabbalistic writings of the 13th century, though in the 14th century the philosopher R. Moshe Narboni did so. See George Vajda, 'Comment le philosophe juif Moïse de Narbonne comprenait-il les paroles extatiques des soufis?' *Actas del primer congreso de estudios árabes islámicos*, Madrid 1964, pp. 129–135. For the impact of Sufi terminology on R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Ḥarar, a student of Avraham Abulafia, see Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany 1988, pp. 73–90, 112–113 as well as Pedaya's suggestions.

knowledge of esotericism in this generation.¹² Among the Kabbalists in Barcelona the vast majority adopted mainly Nahmanides' views on the esoteric lore. One of them, R. Bahya ben Asher Halewwah, wrote several books in which he displayed an acquaintance with Arabic and with books written in this language dealing with philosophy and with Hermetic magic.¹³ Last but not least there were some Ashkenazi figures visiting the town for a short term and writings emanating from the esoteric circles in Ashkenaz. Though well-acquainted with the Nahmanidean material in matters of Kabbalah and presumably part of the entourage of R. Shelomo ben Avraham ben Adret, Nahmanides' main disciple in Barcelona, R. Bahya followed a different path and represents quite an inclusive approach that brought together numerous intellectual trends in his influential commentary on the Pentateuch. This speculative conglomerate is quite visible in the combination between theosophical-theurgical traditions belonging to a variety of Kabbalistic schools: Nahmanides' esoteric traditions (naturally, as he studied with R. Shelomo ben Adret), many Geronese Kabbalistic traditions, some discussions found in the first steps of ecstatic Kabbalah (namely a quote from R. Barukh Togarmi), and presumably also some Castilian forms of Kabbalah.¹⁴ R. Bahya also made use of many philosophical passages, especially from Maimonides, and in a certain case he himself translated some quotes from Arabic.¹⁵ He was also acquainted with some Ashkenazi esoteric traditions. There is no doubt that in the late decades of the 13th century Barcelona hosted a much more variegated form of culture than in the first part of the century. This variety had an impact on the cultural processes taking place in Jewish culture in the city.

Let me start with what may be the earliest source from Barcelona in which there appears a discussion of the transmission of a very important esoteric issue, the vocalization of the letters of the Tetragrammaton, from an Ashkenazi source to a Kabbalist who studied in Barcelona. In his commentary on Numbers 6:27, in a context where traditions on divine names from the *Book of Bahir* are dealt with, R. Bahya wrote:

- 12 Aviezer Ravitzky, *History and Faith: Studies in Jewish Philosophy*, Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought 2, Amsterdam 1966, pp. 262–267.
- 13 This is the case also of Nahmanides. See Moshe Idel, 'Hermeticism and Kabbalah', in eds. P. Lucentini, I. Parri, V.P. Compagni, *Hermeticism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, Brespols 2004, pp. 389–408.
- 14 For an important analysis of the numerous Kabbalistic sources of R. Bahya see the very erudite study of Efraim Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa*, Jerusalem 1970 (Hebrew). For R. Bahya's hermeneutics see Maurizio Mottolese, *La via della qabbalah*, Bologna 2004. See also Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, Albany 1993, pp. 90–93.
- 15 See, e.g., Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, pp. 172–180.

if you will understand the vocalization of the three [consonants of] *Yod* [in the verse] *Yevarekhekha, Yaer Yissa*’, “you will understand the awe of God and you will find the knowledge of the holy ones”¹⁶ because their vowels as they are pronounced hint at the pronunciation of the divine name according to its matter and you should understand it. However, the [esoteric] tradition of Ashkenaz [*Qabbalat Ashkenaz*] that I received in a whisper [is related to the vocalization of the words as] *Haharah, Ha-rodeph, Yiredoph*. And the *illuminatus* [*maskil*] will understand.¹⁷

- 16 The formulation is reminiscent of Proverbs 2:5. It seems that R. Bahya or his source distinguished between the two different achievements found in the biblical verse: the awe of God and the knowledge of the Holy, which may stand for the angels. Insofar as the former is concerned, there is an important parallel in R. Eleazar of Worms’ *Sefer ha-Shem*, where the reference to the Tetragrammaton as the sublime name is strengthened by the gematria. ליראה את השם הנכבד בגימ’ ליראה ד’ אותיות. Both expressions amount indeed to 1073. See R. Ele’azar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, ed. A. Eisenbach, Jerusalem 2004, p. 8. Therefore, it is not only the testimony that a tradition comes from Ashkenaz, which follows the citation of the verse, but also some more precise correspondence to a theme that occurs beforehand in the quoted passage that is found in R. Bahya’s passage. The nexus between the knowledge and the pronunciation of the divine name and awe is based on the assumption that the very act of recitation implied a numinous type of experience. It should be mentioned that R. Ele’azar’s connection between divine name and awe stems from his master R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid. See Daniel Abrams, ‘From Germany to Spain: Numerology as a Mystical Technique’, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996), pp. 96–97, especially note 58 and pp. 98–99 especially note 70. On the various nuances of the biblical *Yirah* see Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire of God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, New York 1982, p. 76. As to the second meaning it would be interesting to compare the use of the Proverbs 2:5 here to what R. Bahya wrote elsewhere in his Commentary on Exodus 15:27, ed. Ch. D. Chavel, Jerusalem 1967, vol. 2, p. 140: מחנות שכינה שואבים בה שבעים תמרים הם המלאכים הסובבים כסא הכבוד המשילום בתמרים על שם הקומה, והנה דוגמתם יצאו מיעקב י”ב שבטים הנחלקים לד’ מחנות ומהם היו שבעים נפש, והבן זה המעט ותמצא מעלת יעקב שנקרא אל, כענין שכתוב (בראשית לג:כ) ויקרא לו אל אלהי ישראל, ודרשו רז”ל מי קראו אל אלהי ישראל, ותדע ותשתכל כל עניני האבות ומצות התורה הכל ציורים ודוגמא למצוא ולדעת דעת קדושים.

For a parallel between *da’at qedoshim* and angels see *Yalqut Shime’oni*, on Proverbs paragraph 944.

- 17 *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, vol. 3, p. 34: ואם תשכיל לנקוד שלשת היודי”ן של יבר- כך יאר ישא אז תבין יראת ה’ ודעת קדושים תמצא, כי תנועתם בנקודם תרמוז על הזכרת השם המפורש בענין והבן. אמנם קבלת אשכנז קבלתי בלחישה ההרה הרודף ירדוף, והמשכיל יבין. Understandingly enough, the other members of the circle of Shelomo ben Adret were quite reluctant to disclose the secret of the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton. See, e.g., R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Tov*, Ms. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale 774, fol. 106b to be discussed below in detail. On the divine name in Nahmanides see Halbertal, *By Way of Truth: Nahmanides and the Creation of Tradition*, pp. 160–161.

This is interesting evidence for the penetration of Ashkenazi esotericism into one of the strongholds of Kabbalah in late 13th century Sefarad. Though the passage was written either in Barcelona or in Saragossa, the event itself may well have taken place in Saragossa, as is indicated by its affinity to a parallel text that we shall deal with immediately below. This event has to do with one of the most important topics in Jewish esotericism: the manner in which the Tetragrammaton is recited, which depends upon the secret vocalization of the four consonants. R. Bahya was in possession of two different traditions, both of which are hinted at the beginning without disclosing all their details. The transition between the first and the second tradition is marked by the term *omnam*, translated as “but”, which reflects the perceived divergence between these traditions.

Let me turn to the details of the Ashkenazi tradition. The first word recurs in several biblical verses and it is always vocalized by three vowels of *qamatz*. The second word occurs only once in the Bible in Joshua 8:20, and it is spelled there with a *Vav*. Its vowels are *Qamatz*, *Holam*, and *Tzerei*. The third word appears also several times in the Bible and it is always spelled without the *Vav*. Its vowels are *Hiriq*, *Sheva*’ and *Holam*. The vocalization of these words constitutes the paradigm for the vocalizations of the three forms of the Tetragrammaton. If we do not count the vocal *Vav*, each of the three words is compounded of four letters, and their vocalization point to the ways in which the Tetragrammata should be pronounced. I assume that we have here an example of the name of twelve letters constituted by three Tetragrammata, an assumption fostered by the parallel found in the *Book of Bahir*¹⁸ and by a parallel to be discussed below.

What is important for the point I would like to make here is the fact that R.

It should be mentioned that R. Bahya mentioned twice that he heard from R. Dan, an Ashkenazi figure, some matters which however do not include esoteric issues. See Israel M. Ta Shma, *Kneset Mehqarim*, Jerusalem 2004, vol. 2, p. 158 (Hebrew). Compare, however, another instance when R. Bahya uses the verb קבלנו “we have received” in a context that may betray an Ashkenazi tradition. See his commentary on Numbers 33:32, ed. Chavel, vol. 3, pp. 228–229. See also the commentary on Deuteronomy 29:28, ed. Chavel, vol. 3, p. 436, where a view is expressed which may stem from Ashkenazi sources: ויש לך להשכיל עוד כי מהפסוק הזה יוצא שם מומחה לשאלת חלום בצרף אותיות והם שלשה שמות, כל שם ושם של שלש אותיות וכולן הן תשעה, והוא סוד הטי”ת הכפולה בשם הידוע, והשם הזה מעיד שאין במלת הנסתרות וא”ו, אמנם מצאנו וא”ו של אלהינו שנשארה יחידית מן הצרף, וזה מבואר

- 18 See Daniel Abrams, ed., *The Book Bahir*, Los Angeles 1994, paragraphs 80–81, pp. 167–169. See also *ibidem*, p. 81 and Adam Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah* Los Angeles 2004, pp. 90–91 (Hebrew). An issue that I cannot enter into here is the possible contribution of the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton in the *Bahir* to a proper understanding of the Ashkenazi tradition adduced by R. Bahya. For the understanding of the divine names in R. Bahya’s commentary in general see Mottolese, *La via della qabbalah*, pp. 46–54.

Bahya confessed that he had received, orally, and according to a certain ritual of whispering, the details of an Ashkenazi tradition, which is understood as being different from another tradition concerning the same topic, which may reflect the *Book of Bahir* as adopted in Catalonia. The ritual of transmission of the divine name is part and parcel of a description found in its fullest form in the introduction to the *Book of the Name*, *Sefer ha-Shem* of R. Ele'azar of Worms, though it had some earlier sources, some of them known also in Barcelona already in the middle of the 12th century.¹⁹ However, the use of the phrase *Qabbalat Ashkenaz* reflects an awareness of the existence of important esoteric topics in that center of Jewish culture which were transmitted in a technical manner — namely in a whisper — to a Jewish figure in Catalonia.²⁰ Interestingly enough, while R. Bahya was ready

19 See Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, pp. 74–76, Ivan G. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany*, Brill 1980, p. 85 and Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton 1994, pp. 238–244. On the status of the divine name in early theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah and its sources see Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 73–102 (Hebrew), and M. Idel, 'Kabbalistic Prayer in Provence', *Tarbiz* 62 (1993), pp. 278–280 (Hebrew). Though there are numerous references to the importance of the divine name in early Kabbalah, and its contemplation is certainly an important component of this Kabbalah as an experiential lore, I am not acquainted with claims of oral transmission of its vocalization among the Provençal and early Catalan Kabbalists or testimonies about its actual pronunciation by a Kabbalist, as we have in Ashkenaz. See also Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 53–55. In more general terms see the discussion of the role of the divine name in Kabbalah in the classic article of Gershom Scholem, 'The Name of God and the Linguistic of the Kabbala', *Diogenes* 79 (1972), pp. 59–80; 80, pp. 164–194. Interestingly enough, in this important article, which delineates the different theories on the divine name, Ḥasidei Ashkenaz are not even mentioned.

20 For the use of the same expression '*Bi-leḥishah*' for the transmission of secrets by R. Yitshaq ben Todros to R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon see the quite extraordinary occurrence of this phrase in *Keter Shem Tov*, Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 774, fol. 84b. On the transmission of the tradition related to the divine name "in a whisper" in connection with the term "Kabbalah" in the Geonic period, in R. Yehudah ben Barzilai of Barcelona's commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, and in Ḥasidei Ashkenaz see Moshe Idel, 'Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names', in R.A. Herrera ed., *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, New York, etc. 1993, pp. 101–103. For this commentary in general see Joseph Dan, 'R. Yehudah ben Barzilai Barceloni's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*: Its Character and Tendencies', in Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich, *Massu'ot, Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 99–119 (Hebrew).

For the discussion of the transmission *bi-leḥishah* in the context of the transmission of knowledge other than the divine name in R. Ele'azar of Worms, see the following passage: "Do not speak so loudly [*gavoah gavoah*] but in a whisper because the glory

to openly discuss the Kabbalistic views of the school of R. Yitsḥaq the Blind, he did not explicitly disclose the details of the tradition he received orally from an Ashkenazi source. Indeed, elsewhere in the same commentary he wrote:

The quintessence of the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is the vocalization. And there is a tradition in the hands of the sages of truth that the Tetragrammaton is transmitted only over water, as it is said²¹: “The voice of the Tetragrammaton over water”.²²

of God [cons]is[ts in] hiding the thing [Proverbs 25:2], and what is written [Ezekiel 1:26] ‘as the appearance of man on the seat’. And the book of *Qomah* ‘*ve-rav koah*’. This is not [to be] transmitted but in a whisper. And if someone does so He will make him sit on the seat of Glory, like Adam the first [man]. This is the reason why the endletters of the words [of the verse ISamuel 2:8.] ‘*ve-kisse*’ *kavod* *yanḥilem*’ form [the consonants of the word] *adam*”.

Cf. his *Sodei Razaya*, ed. Shalom ha-Kohen Weiss, Jerusalem 1991, p. 135; Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1921, fol. 5a.

For the impact on Spanish Kabbalists of another Ashkenazi ritual, the examination of the shadow of man during the night of *Hosha’ana Rabbah*, which was adopted in the circle of the Qalonymite masters from a German contemporary practice, see Moshe Idel, ‘Gazing at the Head in Ashkenazi Hasidism’, *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 6 (1997), pp. 276–279, and more specifically concerning R. Baḥya on this topic see Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Baḥya ben Asher ibn Ḥalawa*, pp. 178–179. Also R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon adopted this custom. For another detail related to a custom of circling the altar on the holiday of *Hosh’ana Rabbah* in R. Ele’azar and Baḥya see Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 183 note 150. For the impact of Ashkenazi mystical technique on Jewish mysticism in general see idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 102–103.

- 21 Psalms 29:3. I translate the verse in the way it has been understood by the Kabbalist.
- 22 *Commentary on Leviticus* 16:30, ed. Chavel, vol. 2, p. 505: אין עיקר הקדושה בהזכרת שם ההוי"ה אלא בנקודו. ומסורת ביד חכמי האמת שאין מוסרין את השם אלא על המים, שנא' שם ההוי"ה אלא בנקודו. On this passage see Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, tr. Ralph Manheim, New York 1969, p. 136 note 1, and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 236–237, 239–240, especially note 207, where he finds the precise source of R. Baḥya’s passage in another text of R. Ele’azar, the *The Commentary on the Merkavah*. On the impact of another motif found in another book of R. Ele’azar on R. Baḥya and Avraham Abulafia, see Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. M. Kallus, Albany 1988, pp. 168–169 note 77, and Wolfson, *ibidem*, p. 251 note 258. See also M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. J. Chipman, Albany 1987, p. 156 note 125. For the impact of Ashkenazi treatments of some earlier motifs on R. Baḥya see also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path*, Albany 1995, pp. 152 note 209, and especially 155 note 224, where again an Ashkenazi tradition is adduced by Baḥya as “Kabbalah”, and p. 175 note 328.

Since I am not acquainted with Kabbalists in the plural who fit this description, I assume that “the sages of truth” are none other than Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, who described a ritual of transmission of the divine name over water. However, it should be pointed out that the Ashkenazi material found in R. Ele’azar’s book does not address the matter of the precise pronunciation and does not mention the vocalization of the four letters in general. “Sages of truth” is a technical term for Kabbalists, and we may infer from this statement that R. Baḥya considered the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz to be Kabbalists or alternatively that he understood their views to be Kabbalah. This reading is fostered by the phrase “*Qabbalat Ashkenaz*” that can be translated as the esoteric tradition stemming from or characteristic of Ashkenaz, which describes a ritual of transmission of the divine name. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the passage from R. Ele’azar of Worms about the transmission of the divine name was copied almost *verbatim*, albeit anonymously, by R. Yitshaq ben Todros in his commentary on the *Mahzor*.²³ Even if he is the person to whom R. Baḥya referred as one of the sages of truth, and there is good reason to assume that R. Yitshaq ben Todros was known personally to R. Baḥya, it is evident that the latter assumed that the former possessed only an older tradition and that he was just one of several persons who were acquainted with this tradition. In any case, it seems that R. Baḥya is the single person known to us who admitted explicitly that he received the tradition about the divine name as practiced by the unnamed Ashkenazi scholars. Even among the Ashkenazi scholars the first person description is not found. Should we therefore consider the Spanish Kabbalist the latest documented rung in the chain of transmission of a certain tradition concerning the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton, as meditated by Ḥasidei Ashkenaz? If the answer is positive, we have an interesting parallel to the discussion between R. Menaḥem Recanati and an Ashkenazi figure some few years after the composition of R. Baḥya’s commentary on the *Torah*.²⁴ We shall have more to say on the transmission of the vocalization in Catalonia immediately below, but first let me turn to a very important parallel to R. Baḥya’s passage

23 See Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 839, fol. 203a. It is difficult to be certain if *Sefer ha-Shem* or another text of R. Ele’azar are the exact source of Yitshaq ben Todros, since the two discussions are very close to each other, but in any case, the difference is not significant. See the previous note.

24 Moshe Idel, *R. Menachem Recanati, The Kabbalist*, (Schocken, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv 1998, I pp. 115, 253 note 202. I cannot enter here into the complex question of the survival of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz as a social structure two generations after the emergence of the written esoteric literature in Germany. See also immediately below the anonymous passage where Ashkenazi sages are mentioned. For more on the survival of the mode of thinking characteristic of the early 13th century Ḥasidei Ashkenaz see Heidi Laura, *The Ashkenazi Kabbalah of R. Menachem Ziyon*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Copenhagen 2005.

found in a collection of Kabbalistic traditions from the 13th century, some of them from the circle of the students of R. Shelomo ben Adret. An anonymous Kabbalist wrote as follows: “I have received from the sages of Ashkenaz about this name that is called the hidden name [and] that it emerges from the filling letters²⁵ of the name [which are] *WaDa’ ’aWo ’a* and this is [the vocalization found in the verse] ‘I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined to me’²⁶ mercy. And together with the four letters of the special name they amount to ten, like its letters”.²⁷

- 25 In Hebrew *ta’alumatav*, which is used in Ashkenazi sources for the letters that fill the plene spelling of the letters of the Tetragrammaton. Thus *Yod* = *YWD* produces *WD*, *He* = *H’* produces *’* and *VaV* = *W’W* produces *’W*. Those letters constitute the sequence of consonants ודא וא. On this term in some early Ashkenazi sources see Idel, ‘On R. Nehemiah ben Shelomo the Prophet’s Commentaries on the Name of Forty-Two’, p. 179, note 118. See also R. Ele’azar of Worms’ *Sefer ha-Shem*, pp. 203, 208 for very similar resorts to the filling letters of the Tetragrammaton as well as the important discussions found in *Sefer ha-Hokhmah* attributed to R. Ele’azar of Worms, printed in the *Commentary on the Pentateuch* attributed to R. Ele’azar of Worms, ed. Joel Klugmann, Benei Beraq 1980, vol. 1, p. 21, and again in this commentary vol. 2, p. 25. See also the occurrence of this filling in material found in Ms. New York, JTS 1878, fol. 39b. It should be pointed out that beforehand on the same page R. Ele’azar of Worms is mentioned.
- 26 Psalm 40:2. The version of the verse adduced here differs from the Masoretic text. Also the vocalization of the words in this verse does not exactly fit the patterns of the vocalizations as I know them from other sources.
- 27 Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1610, fol. 72b: קבלתי מחכמי אשכנז מזה השם הנקרא שם הנעלם על שם שהוא יוצא מתעלומות השם. ודא הוא והו קוה קויתי יהנה גיט עלי חסד ועם ד אותיות של שם Variants of this text are found also in two other manuscripts which preserve the collection of the Kabbalistic traditions. In the version found in Ms. Cambridge, Add. 671.8, fol. 128b, and Ms. Cambridge Or. 2116.8, fol. 72a, the very same text is introduced as קבלה מגדולי אשכנז. See also the important Ms. Parma de Rossi 1221, fol. 114b. Compare also below note 54. It should be mentioned that the Oxford manuscript seems to be the original version, but the derivative ones, in which the great sages are mentioned as the source of the tradition, constitute an interesting case of reverence toward Ashkenazi masters. I would like to point out the use of the plural in both cases, a fact that may point to a group of Ashkenazi masters found at the same time in Barcelona. In any case, compare this usage to the term ‘great’ in connection to an Ashkenazi tradition and the occurrence of the phrase ‘הרב הגדול האשכנזי’ namely the great Ashkenazi Rabbi, in a context that plausibly points to R. Yosef Ashkenazi. See the passage analyzed by Gershom Scholem in J. ben Shelomo and M. Idel eds., *Studies in Kabbalah* [1], Tel Aviv 1998, p. 158 (Hebrew). This *imaginaire* of greatness is interesting in itself. I wonder also whether the term “great” in this context may refer to the height of R. Yosef, who is also called *ha-’arokh*, namely the high one. In any case, see also the reference to R. Yosef Ashkenazi’s commentary on Psalms as written by הרב הגדול ר’ יוסף בן מורי הרב הגדול ר’ שלום ז”ל as well as the description of the *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, as authored by “one of the greats”, אחד מה-

There is no doubt that the collection of theosophical-theurgical short texts found in this manuscript represents a compendium of traditions stemming from many diverse Kabbalistic sources. However, it is quite plausible that, as Scholem speculated, this collection was compiled in Barcelona.²⁸ The analysis of the precise details of this passage is less important for the point I would like to make here. It suffices to stress the Ashkenazi identity of the source and the plausibility that the recipient was a Catalan Kabbalist. It is obvious that this passage is not derived from R. Bahya's *Qabbalat Ashkenaz* or vice-versa. It is an independent event that is related here, and in my opinion it constitutes another piece of evidence for the presence of Ashkenazi masters — note the plural — who transmitted details related to the divine names to an anonymous Catalan recipient.

Let me turn now to the evidence of another Kabbalist from the circle of R. Shelomo ben Adret and R. Yitshaq ben Todros, their student R. Shem Tov ben Avraham ibn Gaon. In his important commentary on the Kabbalistic secrets of Nahmanides' commentary on the Pentateuch, entitled *Keter Shem Tov*, we find a passage that will be quoted from manuscripts since its printed version here is quite problematic:

If someone will tell you that he knows this issue [the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton] from his own heart, do not believe him, but if he received [it]. And behold I hint at the true Kabbalist.²⁹ All the sages should know

מגדולי העבודה and the reference to him as “one of the greats of this worship” by R. David ben Zimra. All of these texts are adduced by Scholem in *Studies in Kabbalah*, pp. 122, 127. Late as some of these statements may be they may reflect some earlier approaches to this book.

28 See Scholem, *ibidem*, p. 8. See also his remarks on these collections in Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, tr. Allan Arkush, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, Princeton 1987, pp. 390, 392 note 67.

29 *Li-mequbbal ha-Emet*. Another possible, though less plausible, translation would be “the true received tradition”. I assume that this phrase parallels the technical term “מִקְבָּל” the recipients of truth, found in Nahmanides' Commentary on Genesis 18:20, in R. Bahya ben Asher's Commentary on Genesis 29:10, and 49:33, Leviticus 9:22, in the Commentary on Nahmanides' secrets of R. Meir Ibn Avi Sahula, Warsaw 1875, fol 5a, and Idel, ‘Nahmanides’, p. 49 note 80. For an interesting distinction between two elements found together in this expression, namely between “קִיבַלְתִּי” “I have received a tradition”, and the more widespread “*derekh ha-emet*”, an exposition or an explication of an already received tradition in the vein of the theosophical symbolism, in Nahmanides and Yitshaq of Acre see Eitan Fishbane, ‘Authority, Tradition and the Creation of Meaning in Medieval Kabbalah: Isaac of Acre's *Illumination of the Eyes*’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72 (2004), pp. 87–88. See also *ibidem*, p. 89 where we find a text by R. Yitshaq of Acre, in which he describes himself as someone who “received from the mouth of persons of truth”. The phrase *meqabbelei*

that when the priests were blessing the Israelites in the Temple and they were blessing by using the Tetragrammaton... and that name was the name of twelve letters and this is its order³⁰: in each blessing the priests who knew it³¹ were pronouncing it [the name] three times so that in its entirety it was twelve. And the tradition [*qabbalah*] of its vocalization that they were pronouncing is as follows: From the first name the first letters are vocalized with a *Qamatz*, and the *He* is accentuated. And from the second name the *Yod* is vocalized as *Qamatz*, the *He* by *Holam* and the *Vav* with *Tzerei* and the [last] *He* is accentuated. And the *Yod* from the third name is vocalized by *Hiriq* and the [consonant] after it by a *Sheva* 'with *Hateph*, and that after it by *Holam* and the last is accentuated. And the sign that is known by the Kabbalist to operate³² and the last *He* is always accentuated and it is "a great diadem of gold"³³ while "the corner stone"³⁴ is always accentuated in the last, to exit it finds the exit. ... I cannot comment on the *Yesod* lest I shall be like someone who tells gossips and disclose the secret.³⁵

ha-Emmet recurs many times also in R. Meir ibn Gabbai's classic '*Avodat ha-Qodesh*. See also the anonymous Kabbalistic discussion of Castilian extraction preserved in Ms. Cambridge Dd. 4.2.2, fol. 124b, where Nahmanides is described as one of the "receivers of truth" — "ממקבלי האמת".

- 30 "*Sidduro*". This is exactly the word that occurs in the version of the book of *Bahir* as quoted in the manuscripts from the circle of Shelomo ben Adret's disciples. See below note 39. However, in the manuscripts of *Sefer ha-Bahir* this word does not occur. See ed. Abrams, *The Book Bahir*, paragraph 80, p. 167. Its occurrence in R. Shem Tov's book may also be evidence of Ashkenazi influence since it occurs in the context of the structure of divine names in R. Ele'azar's *Sefer ha-Shem*, pp. 31, 32.
- 31 From the context it is clear that, according to R. Shem Tov, there were priests who did not know it.
- 32 *La-mequbbal bi-fe'ulah*. We may assume that the operation depends upon the specific vocalizations of the divine name. See, e.g., the discussion of *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, fol. 200a.
- 33 Esther 8:15.
- 34 Zakharia 4:7. According to Rashi on this verse this stone is pointing to *Malkhut* (kingdom).
- 35 I used Ms. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale 838, fol. 62b, Ms. Paris Bibliothèque Nationale 774, fol. 103b, and Ms. Vatican 110: אם יאמר לך אדם שידע מלבו דבר זה אל תאמין אלא אם כן קבל והנני רומז למקובל האמת ידע כל חכם כי כשהיו במקדש ומבכרים הכהנים לישראל היו מברכים אותם בשם המפורש... והשם היה שם בן י"ב וזהו סדורו בכל ברכה היו מזכירין היודעים שם בן ד' אותיות ג' פעמי' שנמצא כלו בן י"ב וקבלת נקודו כשהיו מזכירין אותו כך הוא מהשם הראשון הג' אותיות ראשונות קמוצות והה"א דגושה ומהשם השני היו"ד והוא"ו בצרי וההא דגושה ומהשם השלישי היוד בחירק ושחריה שבא חטופה ושחריה בחולם והאחרונה בדגש והסימן ידוע הוא למקובל בפעולה והה"א אחרונה לעולם דגושה עטרת זהב גדולה היא האבן הראשה לעולם I preferred the version of the first manuscript, since in the other two the whole issue is more veiled. In print the

It is quite evident that the vocalizations of the three Tetragrammata are identical to those received by R. Bahya, though there the names of the vowels were not mentioned explicitly. With the exception of mentioning the accent on the last *He* of the Tetragrammaton, the identity of R. Shem Tov's tradition with that of R. Bahya's is complete. However, interestingly enough, unlike R. Bahya, R. Shem Tov does not reveal the source for his tradition. Unlike the dozens of instances in which he specifies the Kabbalists, especially his two masters Shelomo ben Adret and Yitshaq ben Todros, who supplied him with much less important pieces of theosophical symbolism, here the authoritative source for such an important topic is not provided. Since we have a precise parallel to R. Shem Tov's vocalization, it stands to reason that his source is similar to R. Bahya's source, an Ashkenazi figure whose name is not specified, just as it is the case in the two other passages adduced above which also did not specify the name of the source. Thus, a reader of R. Shem Tov who is unaware of the parallel in R. Bahya will certainly be confident that this is a Kabbalistic tradition. Indeed, on the margin of the printed version of the text, no other than Gershom Scholem noted: "The vocalizations of [the consonants] *YP'L* found in the *Bahir*".³⁶ However, in none of the manuscripts adduced by Abrams in his edition of the book are those vowels to be found and there are other vowels applied to the triple Tetragrammaton.³⁷ Nevertheless, there are two exceptions: one in the recent edition of the book³⁸ and one in the

versions are less clear: see in *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, ed. Yehudah Qoriat, Livorno 1830, fol. 47b, and more recently a better version in the collection of Kabbalistic books entitled *Sefer 'Amudei ha-Qabbalah*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 62. For the possible impact of this understanding of the vocalization see *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, Mantua, 1556, fol. 199b. On the impact of R. Shem Tov's book on *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* in general see Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa*, pp. 249–259 who adduced a remarkable series of other cases of borrowings from *Keter Shem Tov*. It should be mentioned that a discussion about the name of twelve letters as part of the blessing of the priests is found in R. Yitshaq ben Todros, *The Commentary on the Mahzor*, Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 839, fol. 199a, without explicating, however, the vocalization of these consonants.

It should also be mentioned in this context that in his commentary on Nahmanides' secrets R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon states that he heard in the name of the "master of the name" "*Ba'al ha-Shem*" a certain interpretation related to the last letters of the plene writing of the consonants of *Qorban*, that is *Pishtan*. See Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 774, fol. 80a. It may well be that this refers also to an Ashkenazi author. On expressions related to *Ba'al ha-Shem* see also below note 53 and the material adduced in Idel, 'From Italy to Ashkenaz and Back', p. 56 note 26.

36 *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, fol. 47b

37 See p. 167.

38 It should be mentioned that in the commentary on the *Bahir* by R. Meir ibn Avi Sahulah, ad locum, the vocalizations are different, including that which has been

manuscripts where the tradition in the name of the “sages of Ashkenaz” or “the great ones of Ashkenaz” is found.³⁹ However, this can hardly be the source since there is no reason to assume that R. Shem Tov would hesitate to mention this book if it were his source, since he quotes it several times in his book. In fact, already in the case of R. Bahya we may assume that there was a difference between the Ashkenazi tradition he received and the vocalization in the *Book of Bahir*. The emphasis on reception in the case of R. Shem Tov is quite important, and I assume that just as in the two other cases in his circle of Kabbalists he also received the vocalization, not merely found it in a written document.

Let me point out that the accentuated *He* in the Tetragrammaton is exceptional — for another antecedent we shall see more below — and it may have something to do with the appearance of a *mappiq* in the letters *He* found in the divine names *YaH* and *Eloha*.⁴⁰ The existence of such an accentuation created an exegetical dilemma: is Ibn Gaon’s source indicating a possessive function of the *mappiq*, or one that is just related to the divine names? In my opinion, in our case the accentuated *He* is a symbol for the feminine power, *Malkhut*, and it is plausible that it has a possessive quality, being a *mappiq*, and it should be understood on the background of R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon’s theosophy which, following Nahmanides, conceives the last *sefirah* as both different from and belonging to the sefirotic system. It is part of the emanative system but not totally unified to the other nine *sefirot*.⁴¹ We shall return later on to a parallel to this view. We may, therefore, conclude that once again the Ashkenazi tradition became Kabbalah, but this time without the author mentioning his source, just as his master R. Yitshaq ben Todros did in the case of his copying extensively from *Sefer ha-Shem*. Strikingly enough, R. Yitshaq ben Shemuel of Acre, writing at the beginning of the 14th century in Sefarad, in both Barcelona and Castile, claimed that he received the

presented as “according to our Kabbalah” though this is closer to Shem Tov’s vocalization than to that of the printed versions of the *Sefer ha-Bahir*. For a vocalization reminiscent of that of Avi Sahulah, see R. Yitshaq of Acre, *Sefer Meirat Einayyim*, Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1981, p. 90, where the vowels found in *Sefer ha-Bahir* were juxtaposed to the tradition that Bahya quotes as *Qabbalat Ashkenaz*.

39 See, e.g., Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1610, fol. 91b, Ms Parma de Rossi 1211, fol. 113b, Ms. Cambridge 671,8. It is interesting to ask why the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton in these manuscripts of the *Bahir* is identical to both Bahya and R. Shem Tov. This is indeed a complex question, which cannot be analyzed here in detail. In any case, in the first manuscript lengthy passages from *Keter Shem Tov* were copied anonymously and it may be that the collector has been influenced by R. Shem Tov’s vocalization. See also above note 28.

40 See respectively, Isaiah 26:4 and ibidem, 44:8, as well as in many other cases.

41 See Idel, *R. Menachem Recanati, the Kabbalist*, I, pp. 215–231.

very same tradition as did R. Baḥya about the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton consonants.⁴²

Let me address another important issue: the disclosure of the vocalization if the three Tetragrammata seem to include only one aspect of the operation related to the name. It is quite obvious that the use of the term *pe`ulah*, namely operation, indicates some form of knowledge that is essential for its success. The principle that there are different vocalizations of the Tetragrammaton and that each specific vocalization has a different impact — presumably on the various sefirotic powers — is already found in R. Ya'aqov ben Sheshet of Gerona, and may have some roots in the thought of R. Yitshaq the Blind.⁴³ However, there, no specific vocalization was described as transmitted. In any case, it is clear that R. Shem Tov still kept some secret details which he refrained from divulging. It seems that there is a theosophical hint in the above passage: the use of the terms *Ateret* and *Even ha-Roshah* in the context of the last letter of the Tetragrammaton points definitively to the last *sefirah*, *Malkhut*.⁴⁴ Also, the mention of the *Yesod* points in the same direction. Presumably, some form of union between the male and female attributes is hinted at. I assume that the cryptic remarks at the end may point therefore to a certain theosophical interpretation that has been added to the non-theosophical tradition of the vocalization.

All the examples brought above stem from non-Ashkenazi authors, some of whom acknowledge an Ashkenazi source while others do not specify the origin of the vocalization they claim to have received. The question may be asked whether it is possible to verify the attribution of these traditions to Ashkenazi sources. I checked the writings of the Ashkenazi commentators before the first half of the 13th century on the discussion of the priestly blessing, but I did not find anything resembling the above tradition. Even in R. Ele'azar's *Sefer ha-Shem*, where the priestly blessing is discussed at length, the vocalization discussed above does not

42 See in *Sefer Meirat 'Einayim* by R. Isaac of Acre, Goldreich ed., p. 90.

43 See the discussion and the material referred in Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 84, 512 note 17 and 'On R. Isaac Sagi Nahor's Mystical Intention of the Eighteen Benedictions' in Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich eds., *Massu'ot, Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 31–36 (Hebrew).

44 The various symbols mentioned here stand for the last *sefirah* according to Nahmanides's school. See, e.g., Nahmanides on Genesis 49:24, or R. Baḥya on Genesis 48:15. More interesting is the emphasis on the accentuation of the last letter *He* in the Tetragrammaton. The insistence on this accentuation, which means also automatically pronunciation of this silent letter may reflect some implicit polemic with the theory of R. Yitshaq Sagi-Nahor that this letter is not pronounced now, because of the plight of the exile, but only in the eschaton. See Pedaya, *The Name and the Temple*, pp. 92–94. This seems to reflect a sharp divergence between the two early Kabbalistic schools.

appear.⁴⁵ However, I did find quite a similar type of discussion to that described above in an Ashkenazi source that was known in Barcelona. Let us therefore turn to the visit of an Ashkenazi figure to Barcelona in the generation preceding both R. Bahya and R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon.

R. Avraham Axelrod of Cologne, his Visit to Barcelona and Ecstatic Kabbalah

Sometime in the sixties of the 13th century, an Ashkenazi scholar by the name of R. Avraham of Cologne visited the house of R. Shelomo ben Adret's father, presumably in Barcelona.⁴⁶ Shelomo ben Adret knew him personally and described him as follows:

And I have seen a person from Ashkenaz and his name was Avraham of Cologne, and he passed via us to the king of Castile, the father of the king that reigns now, and he changed his name to Nathan, in order to appear differently.⁴⁷ And he was standing in the synagogue of Cologne in the West [wing] and a voice was emerging from the East [wing] from above the ark where the scrolls of the Torah are put. And people were asking him everything and he was answering. And that voice was preaching in a way that no sage does so in Israel. And this Avraham said that the speaker was Elijah, blessed be his memory. And I heard from an old man who was wise and noble who was in the house of my master, my father, who was before him on one of the days of Sabbath and there were there several rabbis that assembled to him from the land. And he delivered a sermon about the portion "And then was the day when Moses finished".⁴⁸ And all the Rabbis who were there testified that none of the Rabbis of the land would have done so.⁴⁹

45 *Sefer ha-Shem*, pp. 155–157.

46 On this figure see Adolph Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, Erstes Helf, Leipzig 1853, pp. 30–35, and Moritz Guedemann, *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Ḥayyim bi-Ymei ha-Beinayyim, be-Tzarfat ve-Ashkenaz* tr. Abraham S. Friedberg, Tel Aviv 1968, pp. 127–128. For some remarks on the Kabbalistic content of R. Avraham Axelrod's book see in Gershom Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abulafia*, edited J. ben Shelomo, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 89–90, 95, 97 (Hebrew), *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 210, 429 note 151, 443–444, 451.

47 להתנכר. The meaning of this verb is not clear. It seems that it refers to an attempt by the Ashkenazi Rabbi to hide or disguise his identity. Jellinek translates it "um nicht erkannt zu werden". *Auswahl*, p. 30.

48 See Deuteronomy ch. 34.

49 *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* ed. Chaim Z. Dimitrovsky, Jerusalem 1990, vol. I no. 34, pp. 105–106: ראייתי אני איש מאשכנז ושמו אברהם דקולוניא ועבר עלינו עד מלך קשטילה אבי

I shall return later on to the importance of the reverence that is expressed in this passage for the Ashkenazi master. From this brief description, it seems that this Avraham stayed for a while in Barcelona where he became famous enough to convince the Rabbis of the land to gather in order to listen to his sermon.

However, for the purpose of our discussion here let me address a text that is found in many manuscripts and in some of its manuscript versions and also in print it is attributed to a certain R. Avraham Axelrod of Cologne. It includes also a reference to a certain R. Menaḥem the disciple of R. Ele'azar.⁵⁰ In other manuscripts a part of it is attributed straightforwardly to R. Menaḥem the disciple of R. Ele'azar of Worms⁵¹ and in many others it is

המלך המולך עכשו. ושנה שמו נתן להתנכר. והיה עומד בבית הכנסת של קולוניא במערב וקול יוצא כנגד מן המזרח מעל גבי הארון שמניחין בו ספרי תורה. ושואלין לו כל דבר והי' משיב. ואותו קול דורש מה שלא ידרוש כל חכם בישראל. ואברהם זה היה אומר שאותו המדבר היה אליהו ז"ל. ושמעתי מפי זקן וחכם ונכבד שהיה בבית אדוני אבי כי היה יום שבת אחד שם לפניו. והיו שם כמה רבנים שנתאספו אליו מן הארץ. ודרש בפרשת ויהי ככלות משה. והעידו כל הרבנים אשר היו שלא היו עושין כן כל רבני הארץ

On this *responsum* see Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 30; J.L. Teicher, 'The Medieval Mind', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, VI (1955), pp. 1–13, Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 170–171, M. Idel, 'R. Shelomo ibn Aderet and Abraham Abulafia: For the History of a Neglected Polemic' in D. Boyarin, & alia eds., *Atara L'Haim: Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 235–251 (Hebrew) and Adam Afterman: *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Los Angeles 2005, pp. 116–117. As to the date of R. Shelomo ben Adret's famous *responsum* I, no. 548, following Itzhak Baer, I proposed to date it between the years 1292–1295. Israel Ta-Shma, *Knesset Mehqarim* II, p. 158 note 2, wondered about the basis of this dating. It has to do with the fact that in this *responsum* Abulafia is described by the pejorative phrase "*shem resha'im yirqav*", which I take to refer to someone after his death. The latest dated book of Abulafia is *Imrei Shefer*, written in 1291. In any case, the tone of Shelomo ben Adret's description of Abulafia indicates that he was no longer actively censuring him and thus that Abulafia was no longer alive.

50 This text is found in different versions in numerous manuscripts and it deserves a detailed study. See for the time being the important observations of Daniel Abrams, 'From Germany to Spain', pp. 85–101, and idem, 'The Literary Emergence of Esotericism in German Pietism', pp. 67–85. See the poor edition by Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, Erstes Helf, Leipzig 1853, pp. 29–48. I propose to distinguish between R. Avraham Axelrod, who is not known to us as a student of R. Ele'azar, and a certain R. Menaḥem, who was described as such. See, however, Scholem, *ibidem*, p. 89, and in the new edition of *Keter Shem Tov* in 'Amudei ha-Qabbalah, where they describe him as a student of R. Ele'azar. I wonder whether there is a connection between this Avraham Axelrod and R. Ele'azar ben Axelrod, a figure who is quoted once in the context of a reference to Heikhalot literature. See E.E. Urbach, R. Abraham ben Azriel, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, Jerusalem 1963, IV, p. 38 (Hebrew).

51 See Gershom Scholem, 'A Key to the Commentaries of Ten Sefirot', *Qiryat Sefer*, 10

anonymous.⁵² In one manuscript it is entitled *Sefer ha-Pe'er* and is attributed to R. Shem Tov of Soria, presumably a mistaken reference to R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon.⁵³ In a few of the anonymous manuscripts it is entitled *Kelal mi-darkhei be-Qabbalah ha-Nevuit*, namely a principle exposition concerning the paths of prophetic Kabbalah.⁵⁴ As attributed to R. Avraham Axelrod, it is found in some early manuscripts copied in Rome in the eighties of the 13th century together with other Kabbalistic and Ḥasidei Ashkenaz material brought there, in my opinion, from Barcelona by R. Avraham Abulafia.⁵⁵ Last but not least, in one of the versions that is found in many manuscripts, parts of the texts are mixed with Castilian forms of Kabbalah.⁵⁶ The differences between the many versions are very significant and given the huge number of manuscripts I would say that this is the most unstable text of early Kabbalah. This is not only a matter of varia between different versions, but of different and diverging conceptual layers which have been grafted upon the originally Ashkenazi discussions of the Tetragrammaton. Though the book has been printed no less than three times, in different versions, we are far from understanding the complexity of the transmission of traditions found in this small book.

This is a Kabbalistic text entitled *Keter Shem Tov*, in which Ashkenazi traditions and the Geronese Kabbalah of R. Ezra⁵⁷ (and according to some versions also of

(1932/1933), pp. 502 no. 35, p. 504 no. 50, p. 505 no. 55, 63 (Hebrew).

52 See e.g., New York, JTS 1878, fol. 40b-44b. For the Kabbalistic text attributed in some manuscripts to a certain R. Menaḥem, the student of R. Ele'azar of Worms, and in other manuscripts to R. Avraham Axelrod of Koeln see the bibliography referred to above in note 50.

53 See Ms. Vatican 235, fol. 2b.

54 See Gershom Scholem, *Kitvei Yad be-Qabbalah*, Jerusalem 1930, p. 57. See also Ms. Milano-Ambrosiana 45/2 and 60/5. As we shall see below, in one of its versions this text was known to prophetic Kabbalists.

55 See Idel, *R. Menachem Recanati, the Kabbalist*, I p. 42. In Ms. Parma de Rossi 1390, fols. 1a-4b, discussed there, one of the earliest dated manuscripts containing this text, copied already in 1284 in Rome, it is attributed to R. Avraham the son of R. Axeldar [sic] of Cologne. In another part of this manuscript, identified by Daniel Abrams, found in Ms. New York, JTS 8124, fol. 3b-5a, there is a part of this book attributed to R. Menaḥem, the student of R. Ele'azar. Thus, in quite an early manuscript in which the two names occur, they appear in different parts and are related to different versions of this book. This evidence deserves a more detailed investigation.

56 See Scholem, *Kitvei Yad be-Qabbalah*, pp. 55, 206–207.

57 See Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 31 (German part) and p. 45 note 9 (Hebrew part), who pointed out the affinity between the end of *Keter Shem Tov* and what he believed was “R. Azriel”’s passage in the commentary on the *Song of Songs*, a book written actually by R. Ezra ben Shelomo. See also Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, p. 170.

Nahmanides), as well as a few philosophical topics, basically Neoplatonic, were mixed. The gist of the text is a discussion of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in general and the letters of the divine name in particular. In some of those versions, though not in all of them, we find the following discussion of the divine name used by the priests during the blessing:

And the last *He* is amending the three *Hawwayot*, and this is the secret of the name three times *YHWH YHWH YHWH*⁵⁸ and by one recitation someone may intend to [all the] three *Hawwayot* [together] when he says *YHWH*⁵⁹ and the *He* with a *Mappiq*, and this is a hidden secret that should not be revealed but to those who separate themselves because by it the name *YH* is explicated⁶⁰... and the first *He* and the last *He* confess that the Creator, blessed be He, is the first and the last.⁶¹

In the first edition and in some of the manuscripts⁶² the three Tetragrammata are not vocalized, and the common denominator between this version and the tradition discussed above is limited to the emphasis on the accentuation of the last of the two letters *He* which occurs solely in R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's passage. However, in one important case at least, we have a vocalization of the twelve letters, and quite a significant overlapping between the two traditions found in two texts entitled *Keter Shem Tov*. In Ms. Milano-Ambrosiana 60, which contains an anonymous version mentioning in its title "the Prophetic Kabbalah" the first Tetragrammaton is vocalized by three *Qamatzs*, the second by a *Qamatz*, a *Holam* and a *Tzere*, and the third one is vocalized by *Pataḥ*, *Sheva'* and *Qamatz*.⁶³ Thus, we have the vocalization of the first two thirds overlapping between R. Shem Tov's tradition and that of R. Avraham Axelrod, and their common assumption regarding a uncommon feature, the accentuation of the *He'*. Given the fact

58 In the recent printing in *'Amudei ha-Qabbalah*, the vocalization of the first Tetragrammaton is three times *Pataḥ*, then *Pataḥ*, *Ḥolam*, *Pataḥ*, and finally *Pataḥ Sheva' Pataḥ*.

59 The vowels are *Patah, Holam Patah*.

60 When spelled out by their names, the letters of the name *YaH*, namely as *Yod He'*, amount to the gematria of 26 like the Tetragrammaton.

61 Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 39, and the somewhat better version printed in *Sefer 'Amudei ha-Qabbalah*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 6: והה"א האחרונה כדי לתקן שלש הויות, והוא סוד פירוש השם, יהוה יהוה יהוה. וגם בקריאה אחת יכול אדם לכוין לשלש הויות באמרו יהוה, והה"א מפיך, והוא סוד נעלם שלא לגלותו כי אם לפרושים, ועוד ה"א ראשונה וה"א אחרונה מורים כי הבורא יתברך הוא ראשון ואחרון

62 See, e.g., the version attributed to R. Menahem the student of R. Ele'azar, Ms. Jerusalem NUL 8^o 1073. fol. 16b.

63 Ms. Milano-Ambrosiana 69, [N. 57 Supl.], fol. 36a.

that this accentuation is conceived of as a secret in the two traditions, I assume that we have a testimony about the existence of a close tradition of vocalizing the Tetragrammaton in Barcelona as articulated by an Ashkenazi master in the generation preceding R. Bahya and R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon.

From reading the context of R. Avraham Axelrod it is quite evident that the two identical letters point respectively to the *sefirah* of *Binah* and to the last *sefirah*, while the *VaV* refers to the six *sefirot* between them. Therefore, we have here an example of a combination between the Ashkenazi pronunciation and a theosophical understanding of the letters of the Tetragrammaton. Moreover, immediately afterwards the Ashkenazi author recommends that whoever “recites the name concentrates on the ten sefirot that He is all, and all is in Him”⁶⁴ in a manner reminiscent of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. The last phrase is quite important since part of it occurs in a very similar manner in R. Barukh Togarmi’s commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*.⁶⁵

Let me turn to the *mappiq* that has been described as fraught with a great secret. In fact, later on in *Keter Shem Tov* we have another discussion of this term:

And the thing that is hidden he brings forth to light”⁶⁶ *Mappiq He* [it means] the “occultation” of the *Hokhmah*, he brings forth to light. “And the *Hokhmah* emerges from the Nought”⁶⁷ her existences are from Nought. “Man cannot know its price”⁶⁸ — to arrange the order of the *Hawwayot* and to understand their qualities.⁶⁹

This is basically a passage copied from R. Ezra of Girona’s third introductory digression to his commentary on the *Song of Songs*.⁷⁰ It means that the word *Ta’alumah* — her occultation — is written with a *mappiq* on the *He* and it stands

64 *Auswahl*, p. 39, *Amudei ha-Qabbalah*, p. 6: וכל המזכיר השם יכוין לעשר ספירות שהוא הנה לך עשר ספירות, עשר מדות כלומר: הכל והכל בו. Compare also *ibidem*, *Auswahl*, p. 44: היות, רק הוייתן תלויה זה בזה וזה בעלת העילות הוא כולל הכל ומאתו יתברך

65 Ed. Scholem, *The Qabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 231.

66 *Ibidem*, 28:11.

67 *Ibidem*, 28:12.

68 *Ibidem*, 28:13.

69 *Auswahl*, p. 47: ותעלומה יוציא אור מפיק ה”א תעלום חכמה הוציא האור, והחכמה מאין תמצא: לא ידע אנוש ערכה הוא סדרה רצה לומר לא ידע אנוש לסדר ההיות ולידע מציאותיה מאין, לא ידע אנוש ערכה הוא סדרה רצה לומר לא ידע אנוש לסדר ההיות ולידע תכונתם

70 See Ch.D. Chavel ed., *The Writings of Nahmanides*, Jerusalem 1964, vol. II, p. 483 and above note 57. I cannot enter here into an analysis of the way in which R. Avraham appropriated R. Ezra’s text. It should, however, be mentioned that he introduced matters related to the divine name, which is the main topic of his *Keter Shem Tov*, in the words that he copied from the Catalan Kabbalist.

for a possessive form: the *Ta'alum* of the *Hokhmah*. Thus we may assume that for R. Avraham Axelrod, following his source R. Ezra, the *mappiq* refers to the possessive grammatical function. Since the last *He* of the divine name is described as accentuated by *mappiq*, it means that the last *sefirah* is understood as related to the other letters of the divine name, namely to *YHV*, just as the last and feminine *sefirah* is described as both different from and at the same time belonging to the other nine *sefirot*. Thus, we have an interpretation of the role of the *mappiq*, which is pretty close to that found in the tradition received by R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon.

It is important to emphasize that the concept that the Tetragrammaton comprises everything was also expounded according to two other passages: “It is a name that comprises everything”,⁷¹ and elsewhere, “and the pillars that are twelve were emerging out of the name of twelve letters that is YHWH reigned, YHWH reigns, and YHWH will reign, and the name of the Holy One blessed be He, bears everything as it is said⁷² ‘the righteous is the foundation of the world’”.⁷³ The last view is reminiscent of a theory of R. Ele’azar of Worms about the divine name that bears everything.⁷⁴ Thus, we have an instance in which the oral performance of the vocalized name instantiates also how this author conceives either the ten *sefirot* or the highest divine potency. The all-comprehensive vision of the divine name is perhaps the more inclusive theory of the name found in early Kabbalah: it consists in a certain specific way of pronunciation; it has a theosophical value and a certain type of effect on reality. The recitation is therefore not only a reminder of a hidden and transcendental entity, but to a certain extent a way to relate to the complex structure of the divine realm in a more direct manner, related as it is by the recitation of a certain specific linguistic unit.⁷⁵

71 *Auswahl*, p. 42: והוא שם כולל הכל יתברך

72 Proverbs 10:25. For the connection between the pillar, the verse and the *sefirah* of *Yesod* that is hinted at in this context, see also in the book of *Bahir*, ed. Abrams, paragraph 71, pp. 160–161. See also Moshe Idel, *Ascension on High In Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines and Ladders*, Budapest 2005, pp. 79–88.

73 *Auswahl*, p. 40: והם ה' מלך ה' מלך ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד, לומר ששמו של הקב"ה סובל הכל, corrected according to manuscripts. The gist of the discussion is that there are twelve pillars, each of which has six extremities, altogether seventy-two. This is part of the attempt to explicate the unfolding of other names from the Tetragrammaton: the four letters become twelve and the twelve become seventy-two. For another example of this unfolding see also the other passage from this book discussed below.

74 See e.g., *Sefer ha-Shem*, p. 188: יהוה ההוה בכל וסובל הכל and in *Sodei Razayya*, ed. Aharon Eisenbach, Jerusalem 2004, p. 30: התחלתו של השם י'שמחו ה'שמים ו'תגל הארץ (ישעיה מה:ז) אני ה' עושה הכל והצרור שנחתמו (תהלים צו:יא) כי בשמו הגדול סובל הכל שנאמר (ישעיה מה:ז) אני ה' עושה הכל והצרור שנחתמו. See also the view of the divine name found already in R. Yehudah he-Hasid's *Sefer Gematriot*, ed. Jacob Stall, Jerusalem 2005, vol. 1, p. 221.

75 See W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of*

Let me return to the quote from Shelomo ben Adret's *responsum* about the wonderful homiletic performance of R. Avraham Axelrod in his father's house. There is nothing magical in it, unlike the story about R. Avraham's performance in Cologne. However, just beforehand, Shelomo ben Adret mentions the use of a special name known as "the name of the homilist", "*shem ha-doresh*", namely the name whose pronunciation helps someone to deliver a sermon. I wonder if the Tetragrammata related to the priestly blessing have something to do with the "name of the homilist", but at least we know that R. Avraham was in the possession of a secret related to the vocalization of the divine name on the one hand, and that he delivered unparalleled sermons, and induced a revelation of Elijah, on the other hand.⁷⁶ I shall return to the "name of the homilist" later on in this study as well as to an evaluation of R. Avraham Axelrod of Cologne.

I hope that I have succeeded in the previous discussions to prove the penetration of a modest Ashkenazi tradition dealing with the vocalization of the divine name into the Nahmanidean school of Kabbalah in Barcelona. In the case of R. Yitshaq ben Todros and R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, the Ashkenazi sources are no longer mentioned, and the Ashkenazi material about one of the most important and delicate subjects in Jewish esotericism, the pronunciation of the divine name, was silently absorbed within the Kabbalistic discourse. It is important to dwell on this development: in the case of R. Bahya, and the anonymous Kabbalist it is evident that they drew their information from an Ashkenazi source. R. Yitshaq of Acre mentioned the fact that he received a tradition identical to that found in R. Bahya, but he did not reveal his source. Given the fact that he was in contact with Ashkenazi masters, it is quite plausible that this was also an Ashkenazi source. R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's testimony did not mention the identity of his source either, but it is conspicuous that he received a certain esoteric tradition which, to extrapolate from the other instances, should be seen also as Ashkenazi. Therefore, we have here an example of an interesting development: earlier evidence in Barcelona mentions Ashkenazi living masters, and in a short while the identity of the source has been obliterated, the content of that transmission becoming "Kabbalah".

In this context let me return to R. Avraham Axelrod of Cologne once again. Was he considered only an expert in the vocalization of the divine name, a type of occultist who engages in a dialogue with Elijah, and an excellent homilist? Is it just an accident that the anonymous version of his *Keter Shem Tov* is entitled "a principle discourse on prophetic Kabbalah"? I believe that there is one more epitheton critical for the understanding of his personality and possible impact. I assume that he was considered a prophet by some persons in the Ashkenazi

Religion, tr. John Carman, The Hague 1971, pp. 411–416, G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, tr. J. N. Turner, Princeton 1986, pp. 147–157.

76 *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* ed. Dimitrovsky, vol.1, p. 105.

provinces — Germany and Northern France — as we learn from no other than Shelomo ben Adret. Let us turn back to his *responsum* which has served as a mine for so much precious information. The *responsum* deals from its beginning to its end with the problem of prophecy and this general framework serves as the background for introducing the other extraordinary phenomena. Shelomo ben Adret wrote his famous *responsum* in order to denigrate Abulafia's claim to be a prophet and to express his hesitation regarding the nature of the young prophet from Avila. Asked by the community of Avila as to how to regard their compatriot who wrote a huge prophetic book as a result of inspiration coming from angels, Shelomo ben Adret makes an inventory of similar phenomena in his lifetime, especially among the Ashkenazi and French Jews. He has the feeling that rabbis in those territories knew how to deal with pneumatics in their communities. Let us quote the pertinent passage:

And the rabbis of Ashkenaz and France did the same to him from Cologne, and from their inquiry it was revealed what it was revealed in truth. Also today there is one in France as it has been testified to us. Sometimes he says future things and some of them happen. And the rabbis promulgated what they promulgated concerning the attitude of people to him, as I have heard.⁷⁷

“Him from Cologne” in the context of this *responsum* can refer only to R. Avraham Axelrod, in whose context alone the city of Cologne has been mentioned some lines beforehand. This means that this R. Avraham was considered by some people to be a prophet, and there was an inquiry, and some regulations were established in connection to him. This must have been quite a great affair if rabbis from two countries cooperated in the inquiry or the decision as to how to deal with him. It means that a certain type of notoriety related to a prophetic claim had been established already before R. Avraham arrived in Barcelona, and this may have been one of the reasons for the gathering of the rabbis in Shelomo ben Adret's father house to listen to his sermon. I see no better way to understand the expression “him from Cologne”. The prophetic claims attributed to R. Avraham Axelrod were exceptional in contemporary Catalonia, as Shelomo ben Adret was unable to bring any local example in his survey, with the exception of the extraordinary capacities of the young child from Lareda. However, they were not so exceptional in Germany and Northern France, where it is possible to identify several persons

77 *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. Dimitrovsky, vol. 1, p. 107: וכן עשו רבני צרפת ואשכנז לאותו שבקולוניא ומתוך חקירתם נודע להם מה שנודע באמת. גם היום בצרפת יש אחד לפי מה שהעידו לנו עליו. ולעתים אומר דברי עתידים ומקצתם באים. והרבנים תקנו מה שתקנו בהנהגת העם עמו לפי מה ששמעתי.

in the decades that precede this figure, or perhaps contemporary to him, that were explicitly described as prophets.⁷⁸ Let me attempt now to deal with the possible impact of R. Avraham Axelrod's book on ecstatic Kabbalah.

First and foremost, as Gershom Scholem has pointed out in an important remark, the author of *Sefer Sha'arei Tsedeq*, a student of Avraham Abulafia whom I identified as R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Ḥarar, active in Messina in the eighties of the 13th century, quoted *verbatim* from a version of Avraham Axelrod's book.⁷⁹ This impact is explicit, though the name of the Ashkenazi master is not mentioned by R. Nathan. In the short book itself, prophecy is dealt with only twice, succinctly. However, short as the two discussions are they had an impact on ecstatic Kabbalah. The issue of prophecy is dealt with in the text itself in a context quite reminiscent of Avraham Abulafia's Kabbalah, though in a succinct manner. When dealing with the meaning of the creation of Eve from Adam he writes in a rather compact sentence: "*avi ve-immi av ke-av em ke-av din nevuah, be-Tseruf*⁸⁰ *dam `im dio...kavod eḥad*".⁸¹ Let me decode the meaning of the rather cryptic series of words: The basic gematria is *Adam ve-Ḥavah* = 70 = *avi ve-immi* = *dam ve-dio*. This gematria recurs in Avraham Abulafia's writings⁸² as does the following one, *Av ke-av* = 26 = *YHVH*⁸³ = *ve-dio*.⁸⁴ However, it would be better not to attempt to interpret the passage of the Ashkenazi author, according to Abulafia's dichotomic exegesis, based on Maimonides' distinction between intellect and imagination.⁸⁵ I assume that R. Avraham Axelrod assumed that all the nations, which he believed to amount to seventy, emerged from Adam and Eve. Whatever may have been the view of the Ashkenazi author, this formulation influenced Abulafia. As to the gematria *Dam* = 44 = *kavod eḥad* it has to do, as we learn from a discussion in R. Ele'azar's *Sefer ha-Shem* and of the contemporary R. Barukh Togarmi, in his commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*, with the plene writing

78 See the bibliography related to those prophets in Idel, 'On R. Nehemiah ben Shelomo the Prophet's Commentaries on the Name of Forty-Two', pp. 157–159.

79 Scholem, *Kitvei Yad be-Qabbalah*, p. 57.

80 In this context the term does not stand for combination of letters but for adding *Dam* to *Dio*.

81 See Ms. Jerusalem 8^o 541, fol. 28a, Ms. Milano-Ambrosiana 60, fol. 37b: אבי ואמי אב כאב אם כאב זהו דין נבואה בצירוף דם עם דיו.

82 See Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 443, 606 note 23.

83 The divine name is mentioned immediately afterwards in this book as part of the gematria *YHVH Mal'e* = *Ben 'Adam* = 97.

84 *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 443, 606 note 24.

85 See Moshe Idel, 'The Battle of the Urges: Psychomachia in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia', in Avriel Bar-Levav ed., *Peace and War in Jewish Culture*, Jerusalem, Haifa 2006, pp. 102–103 (Hebrew), Elliot R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy*, Los Angeles 2000, pp. 139, 150, 209.

of the Tetragrammaton.⁸⁶ Also, the topic of the following gematria *em ke-av* = 64 = *din* = *nevuah* is reminiscent of Abulafia, and I did find a relatively precise parallel to it in his writings: "*sod din nevuah*", which means that the secret, namely the numerical value of *Din*, is *nevuah*.⁸⁷ The discussion as a whole has to do with various fillings of the consonants of the Tetragrammaton, whose amount in its simple form is 26, and in one of its fillings is 44, which together amount to 70. This is part of the vision, a part of which has been discussed above, and to which we shall return immediately, about the unfolding of divine names out of the Tetragrammaton.⁸⁸ This view, which has parallels in Ashkenazi discussions, will

86 See *Sefer ha-Shem*, p. 209, and Scholem, *The Qabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abulafia*, p. 234. See also Scholem, *ibidem*, p. 106 and Asi Farber-Ginat, *The Concept of the Merkabah in the Thirteenth-Century Jewish Esotericism: Sod Ha-Egoz and its Development*, Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1986, p. 146 (Hebrew).

87 See *Mafteah ha-Tokhehot*, ed. Amnon Gross, Jerusalem 2001, p. 51

88 See also *Keter Shem Tov, Auswahl*, p. 41: והשם של ארבע אותיות עיקר והשאר ענפי האילן. "The Tetragrammaton is the root and the others are the branches of the tree that stretch here and there like two arms". Compare also to the concept of arms of God as supporting everything in the context of the letters of the Tetragrammaton in R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid's *Sefer Gematriot*, vol. 1, p. 221. For the emergence of all the names from the Tetragrammaton see R. Ele'azar in his book *ha-Roqeah*, *Hilkhot Ḥasidut, Shores qedushat ha-Yiḥud*, Jerusalem 1960, p. 23, in *Sefer ha-Shem*, pp. 197, 214, and compare to R. Neḥemiah ben Shelomo the Prophet, *Sefer ha-Navon*, Yosef Dan ed., *Studies in Ashkenazi Hasidic Literature*, Ramat Gan 1975, p. 115.

I wonder, however, whether the image of the tree stems from Ashkenazi sources or was appropriated from the Geronese Kabbalah. To be sure, the image of the tree and the ramification of branches is widespread also in early Kabbalah since R. Yitshaq Sagi-Nahor's commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, where it occurs also in the context of the divine name. For Gikatilla's later theory it is the divine name as the root that counts. This view was adopted by R. Yitshaq of Acre who was well-acquainted with R. Yitshaq Sagi-Nahor's commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, as Scholem has pointed out. See his 'R. Isaac of Acre's Commentary on the First Chapter of *Sefer Yetzirah*', *Qiryat Sefer*, 31 (1956), pp. 379–396 (Hebrew) as well as his *Sefer 'Otzar ha-Ḥayyim*, Ms. Moscow-Gunsburg 775, fol. 17b. Compare, however, Hames, *The Art of Conversion*, pp. 281–283, who sees in the passage found in *Meirat 'Einayyim*, ed. Goldreich, pp. 273–274, the possible "summation of the traces of Lullian influence". For the use of the ramification of the tree as the symbol of diversity in unity see the numerous texts from R. Yitshaq Sagi-Nahor and his followers printed in Moshe Idel, 'The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of 'Arayyot in Early Kabbalah', *Kabbalah*, 12 (2004), pp. 104ff, (Hebrew), Pedaya, *The Name and The Temple*, p. 75, and Hames, *ibidem*, pp. 146–147. Given the occurrence of this image in Kabbalah, perhaps also under the impact of Porphyry's famous tree, I wonder to what extent Lull was influenced by Kabbalists or by *Sefer ha-Yashar*. See Hames, *ibidem*, 146–149. On Porphyry, see

become central for the view of R. Yosef Gikatilla, especially in his *Sefer Sha'arei Orah*.⁸⁹ Thus, we may assume that, indeed, the treatise bearing in its title the name of “*qabbalah nevu'it*” related prophecy to divine names, or at least discussed these two issues together, and it indeed impacted on the ecstatic Kabbalah.

Let me turn to the other, more substantial, discussion of prophecy in *Keter Shem Tov*:

Behold the Tetragrammaton is turned and changed into the name of seventy-two, and the seventy-two consists in triads of three *Hawayot*, and this is the secret of the sublime name, like *HYH, VHVH VYHYH*⁹⁰, and the Tetragrammaton is the root ... and they are powers⁹¹, as we have explained, and the seventy-two triads amount to two hundred sixteen that amounts to *Aryeh*, as it is said⁹² “The Lion has roared who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who will not prophecy?” And the numerical value of *Aryeh* amounts to *Gevurah*, to denote the power that frightens the hearts, and there is no end to its inquiry and this is the reason it has been designated as *Aryeh*, that is powerful and the king of the animals, and Yehudah is called by this name “Yehudah, the lion’s whelp”⁹³ that is the king of Jerusalem. And the prophet is called on the general name of prophecy that is called *Aryeh*, according to the parable, and it is called *Keter `Elyon*, that is the First Cause, that is Infinite.⁹⁴

This is a combination between Ashkenazi theories and theosophical symbolism. Let us decode the major gematria: *Aryeh* = 216 = *Gevurah* = *ha-Gibbor* = three times seventy-two. The connection between prophecy and the lion or the figure

Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 447, who already pointed out the possibility that Lull was influenced by Porphyry.

89 See Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 360–361.

90 The meaning of the consonants is “He was, is and will be” whose twelve letters when permuted, amount to three Tetragrammata.

91 *Koḥot*. Immediately beforehand the text speaks about 72 powers related to the name of seventy-two.

92 Amos 3:8.

93 Genesis 49:9.

94 *Keter Shem Tov*, in Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 41: הרי לך שם בן ד' אותיות מתגלגל ומתהפך: וזהו סוד השם הנכבד לשבעים ושנים, והשבעים ושנים כלם משולשים על שם ההיות המשולשות, וזהו סוד השם הנכבד כגון היה והוא ויהיה, והשם של ארבע אותיות עיקר... והם כחות כאשר ביארנו, והשבעים ושנים משולשין יעלו למנין מאתים וששה עשר, ויהיו כמנין אר"ה, הוא שנאמר אריה שאג מי לא יירא, ה' אלהים דבר מי לא ינבא, וחשבון אר"ה גבור"ה, להורות על הכח המפחיד הלבבות אשר אין תכלית למחקרו, ועל כן קראו בשם אריה שהוא הגבור ומלך בחיות, ועל שמו שם יהודה גור אריה, שהוא מלך ירושלים, והנביא על שם כלל הנבואה קראו אריה דרך משל, והוא הנקרא כתר עליון, היא העלה העליונה אשר אין לה סוף

two hundred and sixteen is based upon the parallelism found in the biblical verse, between the Lion, the fear, prophecy and the divine names that refer to God. Instead of the personal understanding of the Bible, which points to the numinous power of God that compels the prophet to prophecy, the Ashkenazi numerical interpretation reads into the text “hidden” messages, namely that prophecy is attained by means of the name of seventy-two, hinted at by *Aryeh*, and this is connected to the special power of the Lion that is “reflected” by the power, *Gevurah*. *Yehudah* is involved here because of the biblical connection between him and the totem of the Lion, but, I assume, also because of the letters of the Tetragrammaton that are found in this name. In a way, *Yehudah* generates *Aryeh*, namely the Tetragrammaton generates the two-hundred and sixteen letters of the name of seventy-two. On the other hand, Jerusalem is connected not only to *Yehudah*, but also to the name of two hundred and sixteen, since the first three consonants of the name *Yerushalayyim* amount indeed to two hundred and sixteen. Less transparent is the connection of this entire discussion to the first *sefirah*, identified with the infinity. In the other cases of the theosophical interpretation of the name of seventy-two it is connected basically with the *sefirah* of *Hesed*, because of the gematria *Hesed* = 72, or more rarely with the *sefirah* of *Gevurah*. I assume that this is a case of an artificial imposition of the theosophical system on the independent Ashkenazi calculations. In any case, it points to the elevated status of prophecy that is connected to the highest divine plane, something that is not characteristic of the main line of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, which relates this religious experience with much lower sefirotic manifestations.

The idea that Jerusalem is connected to the name of seventy-two three times, namely two hundred and sixteen, is found in Avraham Abulafia’s *Secret of Jerusalem* and in other books of Abulafia or the younger Gikatilla.⁹⁵ However, it is expressed much more explicitly in a text from R. Yitshaq of Acre’s *Otsar Hayyim*, a book in which the impact of the ecstatic Kabbalah is also more explicit: “Two hundred sixteen is the numerical value of the name of seventy-two, which is wonderful and the miracles of its deeds multiplied, and whose name is Aryeh and by its force the prophets are prophesying ‘The Lion has roared who will not fear?’”⁹⁶ What is, however, also interesting is the connection that is quite rare, if

95 See Moshe Idel, ‘Jerusalem in Thirteenth Century Jewish Thought’, in Joshua Prawer and Hagai Ben-Shammai eds., *The History of Jerusalem, Crusaders and Ayyubids (1099–1250)*, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 276–283 (Hebrew). For more on the impact of Ashkenazi traditions about the name of seventy-two and their impact on Avraham Abulafia see Moshe Idel, ‘On “seelat ḥalom” in Hasidei Ashkenaz: sources and influences’, *Materia Giudaica* 10,1 (2005), pp. 99–109.

96 Ms. Moscow-Guensburg 775, fol. 16b. See also Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, p. 236 note 191.

not exclusive to R. Yitshaq of Acre, between prophecy and the *sefirah* of *Keter*, as found in the above passage from *Keter Shem Tov*.⁹⁷ As mentioned above, R. Yitshaq of Acre was a student of R. Nathan Harar, a Kabbalist who himself copied a sentence from *Keter Shem Tov*.⁹⁸

Were these ingenuous calculations, previously unknown in Catalan Kabbalah, part of the sermon of R. Avraham Axelrod which made such a deep impression among the Rabbis gathered in Shelomo ben Adret's father's house? Let me clarify my position: what is important in those affinities is not just the transition of some mathematical calculations from one center of Jewish culture to another. Such a transition may be trivial and it can be easily proven, as I hope I have done above. It is of more significance that an important ideal has been transmitted from one center to another and this is the assumption that prophecy is a currently viable experience. Such a transmission is the product not only of acquaintance with texts and their literary impact, but also of the living presence of a human model who could impact upon people in a cultural center in which his ideal was not yet found. As Abrams has pointed out, the intense resort to gematrias may imply some form of pneumatic experience.⁹⁹ However, the ideal of prophecy is much more "sublime" and, at the same time, more problematic from the institutional point of view, and it is this ideal that moved to the center of Avraham Abulafia's Kabbalah.

Here is not the place to discuss the complex question of the main sources of Abulafia's Kabbalah. The Ashkenazi background of many of his exegetical and mystical techniques is undeniable, even when there are also other possible sources. Here I would like to deal with the reverberation of one of the topics discussed above: the accent on the second *He* of the Tetragrammaton. In his *Sefer Otsar 'Eden Ganuz*, written in Messina in 1285/86, we read:

YHVH: The great *Qamatz* is under the *VaV* and under the second *He* there is no vowel. And those who put the *Mappiq* that is a *Qamatz* are correct ... and the *He* that is not vocalized points to the matter that has no form, and to a body without a spirit, and to a person without an intellect, and it is incumbent that someone will by himself introduce the intellectual spirit. And this is the reason why this name, by its very essence, teaches that there is a power in the hand of an individual belonging to the human species to actualize his intellect by the knowledge of the name... *Yod* is *Sheva*, *He* is *Holam*, *H YH*, *VaV* is *Qamatz*, *V YHV*, *He* is *Mappiq*, *H YHWH*, and their secret is *YHWH VYHVH*. And this secret is one of the supernal and hidden

97 See the discussion of a passage from the same book of R. Yitshaq, in Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, New Haven 1998, p. 116.

98 See above note 79.

99 See Idel, 'From Germany to Spain'.

secrets concerning the knowledge of the name together with other names. And the rank of the person who knows this knowledge is a wondrous one, and the form of that pronunciation brings about this knowledge not any other, without doubt. And the benefit and retribution [of the knowledge] is very great, timeless and infinite, and it will not arrive but to those¹⁰⁰ who are the lovers of truth alone, not to any other.¹⁰¹

It is evident from what is written before the quote and from the content of this passage that Abulafia adopted the more widespread vocalization of the Tetragrammaton based upon the pronunciation of *Adonay*. However, he added to the regular pronunciation the possibility of accentuating the last *He*, which is highly relevant to our discussion above. He testified that there are people who do so and he accepted this alternative. However, he offered an interpretation that has nothing to do with the practice of accentuation. Speculating on the meaning of *mappiq* in Aramaic as issuing or causing something to exit, he interpreted the last letter *He* as referring to a hylic state which can be actualized, causing the exit from *potentia* to *actu* by a person. In this case, the *mappiq* is understood as introducing something into the brute matter that vivifies it: in man it effects the body in order to develop the intellect. This actualization of the intellect is the highest human development possible, and it can be achieved, according to Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah, by means of techniques related to the divine name. In other words, Abulafia interprets an uncommon practice of accentuation that is found in some circles in a manner that fits his specific type of Kabbalah, as an allegory of the paramount importance of human initiative to develop the spiritual faculty. It should be mentioned that the knowledge of the name is not a form of gnosis but an experiential form of cognition, as we learn from other discussions in which this term is mentioned.¹⁰² In the same context, the actualization of the intellect is described as prophecy.¹⁰³ Though Abulafia wrote his book in 1285/6,

100 The following phrase occurs almost *verbatim* at the beginning of the same chapter, p. 337.

101 3:8, ed. Amnon Gross, Jerusalem 2000, p. 341: ותחת הוא"ו, ותחת יהוה והנה קמץ גדול תחת הוא"ו, ותחת יהוה"א השני אין נקוד. והמשימים מפיו"ק הוא קמץ"ך הדין אתם... וה"א בלא נקוד מורה על גולם בלא צורה ועל גוף בלא רוח ועל איש בלא שכל, שיצריך לו שיתן בעצמו צורת רוח שכלית על כן הורה זה השם באמתתו שיש יכלת באיש מאישי מין האדם להוציא שכלו עם ידיעת ש"ם המשמ"ש מן הכח אל הפעל... יוד שוא הא חלם ה יה וו קמץ ו יהו הא מפיק ה יהו"ה וסודם יהו"ה ויהיה. זהו הסוד שהוא אחת מן הסודות העליונים הנעלמים שבידיעת השם עם שאר השמות. ומעלת האיש היודע זו הידיעה היא מעלה מופלאה, וצורת ההזכרה האמתית היא המביאה לידי הידיעה לא זולתה בלא ספק. ותועלתה וגמולה ושכרה הרבה מאד שהוא בלתי זמן ובלתי תכלית, ולא יגיע כי אם לאוהבי האמת לבדם ולא לבלתם

102 See *Sefer Gan Na'ul*, ed. Amnon Gross, Jerusalem 2000, p. 41.

103 Ibidem, p. 40.

namely before the other Kabbalists mentioned above (with the exception only of R. Avraham Axelrod), he did not influence any of them and I hardly imagine that he took his theory about the accent on the last *He* of the Tetragrammaton from another source. It is Kabbalistic material found together with R. Barukh Togarmi's commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah* in Ms. New York, JTS 1884, an issue that will be dealt with in detail elsewhere.

What is conspicuous in some of the above discussions is the rhetoric of secrecy that is attached to the discussion of the *mappiq* which is reminiscent of the passages of R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon and of R. Avraham Axelrod. Though I assume that these three discussions are independent, as they differ from each other in some details, they share the assumption that the *mappiq* constitutes a great secret, or at least is part of such a secret. Despite the differences in details, these Kabbalists share the view about the *He* of the Tetragrammaton with a *mappiq* that I did not find elsewhere in the history of Kabbalah. In my opinion, it is quite plausible that this common denominator is connected to the fact that all four Kabbalists were residents of Barcelona.

A Shift in the Thrust of Commentaries on Sefer Yetsirah

As we have seen above, R. Avraham Abulafia, the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah, was also concerned with divine names. He was well-acquainted with Ashkenazi traditions and regarded the divine name as the main topic of his Kabbalistic system. He studied some types of Kabbalah for the first time in Barcelona in 1270 or earlier,¹⁰⁴ and he mentioned explicitly two Ashkenazi commentaries on *Sefer Yetsirah*, as well as the names of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid and R. Ele'azar of Worms in another context. Especially important is the fact that he described the commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah* by R. Ele'azar of Worms as consisting in "its majority of hidden *qabbalot* [*qabbalot ne'elamot*]"¹⁰⁵. It is hard to fathom the precise semantic field

104 See the earlier reference to his stay in Barcelona in his commentary on *Sefer ha-'Eduṭ*, printed in *Matzref ha-Sekhel*, ed. Amnon Gross, Jerusalem 2001, p. 57: *והיה הוא בן ט"ל שנה והיא השנה התשיעית להתחלת נבואתו אבל עד השנה ההיא לא חיבר ספר שייחסהו לשם נבואה כלל אע"פ שחבר ספרי חכמות אחרים רבים ומקצתם הם ספרי סתרי קבלה. ובשנה התשיעית ההיא עוררהו השם ללכת לרומי רבתי כאשר צווה בברצלונה בשנת הא"ל. ובלכתו עבר דרך טראני ונתפש בידי גוים מפני מלשינות שהלשינוהו יהודים ונעשה לו נס ועזרו השם וניצל. ועבר דרך קפואה וחיבר שם בשנה העשירית לצאתו מברצלונה ספר שני והוא "ספר החיים".*

105 See *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, p. 33: *הרב ר' יהודה החסיד האשכנזי זצ"ל ונמשך קצת אחר דברי ר' שבתי הרופא, הרב ר' אלעזר האשכנזי ז"ל ורובו קבלות נעלמות*. The use of the syntagm "*qabbalot ne'elamot*" is exceptional, to the best of my knowledge, in the entire Kabbalistic literature. In only one other place Abulafia uses a similar phrase "*qabbalah ne'elemet*" in order to distinguish the esotericism of Kabbalah from that

of the two words found in this statement. In the language of Abulafia the term *Qabbalah* may stand both for tradition in general and for an esoteric tradition. If the latter meaning is relevant here, as I am inclined to assume, the “hidden” reflects an attempt to elevate the content of R. Ele’azar’s doctrine as superior to other forms of esotericism.

However, unlike the two testimonies discussed above of direct and oral contacts with persons who are described as Ashkenazi, Abulafia’s sources, as described here and insofar as we know explicitly, were written documents, though we shall have more to say elsewhere about the possibility that in Barcelona he met the Ashkenazi Kabbalist R. Yosef ben Shalom.¹⁰⁶ This means that if additional

of the philosophers, which he describes as *derekh ha-filosofit ha-nistar [sic]*. See *Sefer ha-Ge’ulah*, ed. R. Cohen, Jerusalem 2001, p. 14. Interestingly enough, a similar distinction occurs also in R. Yitshaq of Acre. See Boaz Huss, ‘NISAN: The Wife of the Infinite: The Mystical Hermeneutics of Rabbi Isaac of Acre’, *Kabbalah*, 5 (2000), pp. 157–158 and 175. For other references to these two Ashkenazi figures see Abulafia’s epistle entitled “Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah”, addressed to this figure in the late eighties of the 13th century, edited by Adolph Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, Erstes Helf, Leipzig, 1853, p. 25. I wonder whether the book entitled *Sefer Raziel* quoted by Abulafia in one of his epistles, where a gematria is found, does not reflect another instance of awareness of Ashkenazi esoteric traditions. This gematria is not found in the extant books which are entitled *Raziel*. See Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah, ed. A. Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabala*, Leipzig 1854, p. 2, and see also p. 21. It should be mentioned that according to a testimony stemming from the mid-13th century, there was a version of *Sefer Raziel* that also dealt with combinations of letters. See Nicolas Sed, ‘Le *Sefer ha-Razim* et la méthode de “Combination de Lettres”’, *REJ* 130 (1971), pp. 295–304. This means that it is plausible to assume that there were also other channels for transmission of earlier techniques of combinations of letters to Spanish Kabbalists which did not depend on Ashkenazi sources.

- 106 For details on this Kabbalist see Hallamish’s preface to *Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, pp. 11–27, and his ‘Fragments from the Commentaries of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi on Psalms’, *Daat* 10 (1983), pp. 57–70 (Hebrew), Georges Vajda, ‘Un chapitre de l’histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie: La polémique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi de Catalogne’, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 23 (1956), pp. 45–144; Gershom Scholem, ‘The Real Author of the *Commentary on Sefer Yetsirah* Attributed to R. Abraham ben David and His Works’, *Qiryat Sefer*, 4 (1927–1928), pp. 294–295 (Hebrew), reprinted in his *Studies in Kabbalah*, pp. 112–136, Hames, *The Art of Conversion*, pp. 139–141, 169–170, Haviva Pedaya, ‘Sabbath, Sabbatai, and the Diminution of Moon: The Holy Conjunction, Sign and Image’, in H. Pedayah ed., *Myth in Judaism = Eshel Beer-Sheva*, 4 (1996), pp. 150–153 (Hebrew), Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 93–95, and Moshe Idel, ‘An Anonymous Commentary on *Shir ha-Yihud*’, K.E Groezinger and J. Dan eds., *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, Berlin, New York 1995, pp. 151–154, *Golem; Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid*, pp. 119–126. It should be mentioned that the

conclusive evidence as to the early date of his presence in the city will emerge, his activity there should be moved to the late sixties of the 13th century, much earlier than has been assumed in modern scholarship. He too wrote an important commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*. R. Yosef's connection to the Qalonymite family in the Rhineland is explicit and represents therefore a case of the direct presence of a descendent of the most important family in the history of Ashkenazi esotericism in Barcelona. However, it is not just his Ashkenazi extraction that concerns me here but the fact that there are some clear instances in which elements of Ashkenazi esotericism are quite evident in his writings.¹⁰⁷ He too, like his forefathers and like Abulafia, was concerned with the importance of the divine name, and refers to it as part of a mystical technique to reach prophecy.

Moreover, unlike the traditions described in the previous section, which emphasize the precise vocalization of the consonants of the divine name in a clearly ritualistic context that took place in ancient times, Abulafia, like R. Yosef Ashkenazi, adopted another approach, also Ashkenazi, which dealt with the combination of each of the letters of the divine name with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Thus, while the Barcelonese Kabbalists were interested in the static and sacrosanct gnosis of vocalization, Abulafia was concerned much more with the dynamic aspect of the Ashkenazi tradition dealing with the divine name and its recitation when combined with other letters of the alphabet, and turned it into the kernel of one of his mystical techniques to attain prophecy, as described in his influential handbook, *Sefer Or ha-Sekhel*. In my opinion, this combinatory approach reflects the impact of R. Ele'azar's *Sefer ha-Shem* as it

affinities between some Ismailia views regarding cosmic cycles and metempsychosis and *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pointed out by Pines, hold also for R. Yosef Ashkenazi who preceded the *Book of Temunah* and in my opinion also influenced its thought. See Shelomo Pines, 'Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's Kuzari', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* II (1980), pp. 249–251. Thus, it seems that the Ashkenazi Kabbalist was at least one of the main proponents of Ismailiah views in Kabbalah. It should be pointed out that in his writings there are several Arabic words as well as descriptions of Arabic customs. On the affinity between *Sefer ha-Temunah* and R. Yosef Ashkenazi see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 163 note 132.

107 See Scholem, *Studies in Kabbalah*, p. 119, *Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, p. 259. On Ashkenaz see also ibidem, pp. 226, 229, 247. The impact of R. Ele'azar's *Sefer ha-Shem*, pp. 27–28, is discussed on pp. 256–257. He refers several times to the German language, as *Leshon Ashkenaz*. Compare also his discussion of the affinity between the Tetragrammaton and the *Tzelem* in his *Commentary on Sefer Yetsirah*, fol. 34cd, and his *Kabbalistic Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, pp. 147, 149, and similar discussions in many of the writings of R. Ele'azar of Worms. Cf. M. Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles 2005, pp. 109–113, and idem, *Golem*.

was the impact of the same combinatory technique related to the Golem which influenced Abulafia's interest in the topic.¹⁰⁸

Three figures who were probably active in Barcelona, Yosef Ashkenazi, Avraham Abulafia, and R. Yitshaq of Acre, were deeply interested in *Sefer Yetsirah* and the first two wrote extensive commentaries on this book. The writing of a commentary on this book was not by itself a departure from either the Geronese Kabbalists following R. Yitshaq the Blind, who wrote commentaries on this book, or from Nahmanides who also wrote a short commentary. In fact, already in middle of the 12th century a Barcelonese author, R. Yehudah ben Barzilai Barceloni, wrote an extensive commentary on this book but, interestingly enough, it was never mentioned by Abulafia or by any other Kabbalist with whom I am acquainted. It survived in just one single manuscript, and it belongs to the philosophical branch of the interpretation of this book. This ignorance of such a voluminous commentary may point to the fact that the group of Kabbalists that gravitated around commentaries on *Sefer Yetsirah* in Barcelona do not reflect an inner development in the Jewish culture of the city. Nevertheless, what is new in the commentaries of Abulafia and Yosef Ashkenazi written a generation later is the emphasis they put on the combinatory aspects of *Sefer Yetsirah*.¹⁰⁹ While the earlier Geronese Kabbalists emphasized the emanative aspects of the divine autogenesis, the later commentators mentioned above were much more open to the combinatory aspects of *Sefer Yetsirah*, which were put in relief for the first time by Ashkenazi commentaries written at the beginning of the 13th century by R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid and R. Ele'azar of Worms and which were studied by Abulafia in Barcelona. This is also the case of another commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*, mentioned by Abulafia which he attributed to a certain R. Yitshaq of Béziers, of which extant fragments are replete with combinatory techniques. According to Abulafia this commentary was studied in Barcelona.¹¹⁰ Yosef Ashkenazi was certainly aware of Ashkenazi esoteric traditions, since he was a descendant of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid. Therefore, the impact of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz is not only a matter of direct and specific references to Ashkenazi authors and books, but is also reflected in the way in which the gist of *Sefer Yetsirah* was understood in this city, probably in the commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah* by R. Barukh Togarmi and

108 See Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 22–23. See also my *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions*, pp. 96–104, 'Defining Kabbalah', idem, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 314–350, and 'On the Meanings of the term "Kabbalah": Between the Prophetic Kabbalah and the Kabbalah of Sefirot in the 13th Century', *Pe'amim* 93 (2002), pp. 39–76 (Hebrew).

109 See also Abrams, 'From Germany to Spain', pp. 85–101.

110 In a separate study I hope to print the extant material in his name appearing in Abulafia's writings.

more clearly in the works of Avraham Abulafia. We have a *terminus ante quem* for the presence and impact of those two Ashkenazi commentaries on this book in Barcelona: it is indubitably before 1270, the year when Abulafia studied these commentaries there. We may therefore assume that sometime between 1250 and 1270 esoteric material that arrived from Ashkenaz became part of the curriculum of a small group of Kabbalists who were in the possession of twelve commentaries on *Sefer Yetsirah* and created some form of syntheses between the autochthonic esoteric traditions, philosophy and Ashkenazi material. Abulafia was, no doubt, the most influential product of this group, though he himself brought with him an interest in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and perhaps received there some esoteric interpretations of the *Guide*.

In this period an interesting though anonymous commentary on liturgy, based on *ars combinatoria*, a technique of combining letters, was composed somewhere in Catalonia.¹¹¹ As I have suggested, its content had an impact on Ramon Llul's theories of combinations.¹¹² This emphasis on combinations of letters does not mean that the more emanative approach to the *sefirot* which appear in *Sefer Yetsirah*, as found in Nahmanides's theory of Glories in his own commentary on this book, did not also leave its imprint on Llul's theory of nine *dignitates*, but that we should be much more aware of the importance of the change introduced by the gist of the Ashkenazi approach to this book as articulated in commentaries written by authors who were active in Barcelona since the late sixties.¹¹³

Some Concluding Remarks

The examples of the appropriation of Ashkenazi material by Spanish Kabbalists presented here are important in and of themselves as they deal with the paramount esoteric issue in Judaism. I propose not to attempt to extrapolate from them to any other topic, unless it is demonstrated in detail first. Though the above example concerning the Tetragrammaton and some other issues mentioned in the notes are related solely to the Nahmanidean school, there are examples that concern other Kabbalistic schools active in Barcelona, and also in those cases the divine name is

111 This commentary has been edited and analyzed by Afterman in *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Los Angeles 2005. For an analysis of the combinatory thought in this book see Afterman, *ibidem*, pp. 38–64, 90–104

112 Moshe Idel, 'Ramon Lull and Ecstatic Kabbalah', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 51 (1988), pp. 170–174, and Hames, *The Art of Conversion*, pp. 27, 133–134, 139–141.

113 See Moshe Idel, '*Dignitates* and *Kavod*: Two Theological Concepts in Catalan Mysticism', *Studia Luliana* 36 (1996), pp. 69–78; Hames, *ibidem*, pp. 124–133.

important. In any case, it seems that the Ashkenazi tradition was adopted not only in the more inclusive approach of R. Bahya in his commentary on the *Pentateuch*, but also, though only implicitly, in the more exclusive one characteristic of R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's *Keter Shem Tov*. It should also be pointed out that the theosophical structures in which the Spanish Kabbalists believed remained basically unaffected by the introduction of the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton. Since the systemic theological structure of the Ashkenazi Hasidim was quite loose, it was easy to extract themes from their books and absorb them in wider and different theological structures. This is true not only with regard to the topics discussed above, but also with regard to the appropriation of other themes stemming from Ashkenazi sources, for example, the Golem.¹¹⁴

We have dealt above with the penetration into Catalonia of the details of an Ashkenazi tradition. However, it seems that this is not the entire story. Both R. Avraham Axelrod and R. Avraham Abulafia made their way to Castile and their imprint on the Kabbalah there is obvious in several writings from the mid-seventies of the 13th century. However, the analysis of this development and its impact on Kabbalah in general deserves another study. It will suffice for the time being to point out the fact that a prophet emerged in the early nineties in Avila. Is it a mere coincidence that this happened after the visit to Castile of two other prophets? Do the “name of the homilist” and the “name of the writer”, known in the circle from which the *Zohar* emerged, reflect Ashkenazi impact? These important questions transcend the scope of the present survey and require additional research.

Last but not least: in some of the instances mentioned above, the printed form of the material analyzed does not contain vocalization, and this prevented the recognition of the affinity between the different texts. Even in some of the manuscripts I have examined this vocalization does not appear. This situation demonstrates that at least with regard to the more esoteric aspects of Kabbalah, it is hard to advance without an extensive checking of manuscripts, a practice that has been marginalized in the study of Kabbalah.

In order to prevent possible misunderstandings, I will reiterate that the focus of my study above is the Kabbalistic scene in late 13th century Barcelona. I refrained from dealing here with Ashkenazi impact in the period prior to Nahmanides' departure from Sefarad, since this topic has already been studied elsewhere. Nor did I address in detail the question of the presence and impact of Ashkenazi esotericism in Castile.¹¹⁵ I preferred to limit the scope of my investigation to one place and a limited period of time, roughly speaking, 1267–1310. It was during this relatively short period of time that the arrival of Ashkenazi masters intensified,

114 See Moshe Idel, *Golem*, pp. 127–142.

115 On the Castilian material see Abrams, ‘From Germany to Spain’ and the pertinent bibliography there.

either because of cultural reasons, or because of the persecutions of the Jews in the last decade of the 13th century. To be sure, none of the Ashkenazi masters — to the extent I am aware of their views — ever expressed the intention to offer a synthesis between their esoteric knowledge and the Kabbalah. The various mixtures and syntheses emerged, therefore, as the result of accidents related to emigration and thus they are a matter of mere accidental encounters, and no historiosophy of the development of Kabbalah should be extrapolated from my discussions above. No synthesis between two or more modes of thought is in my opinion better than its primary components, though in the Middle Ages there might have been persons who thought so. Nevertheless, the fact that the Kabbalah of both Avraham Abulafia and R. Yosef Ashkenazi had such a great impact on the subsequent developments in Kabbalah may be connected to the fact that they brought together different trends, while the Nahmanidean Kabbalah did not inspire creative developments. It seems to me that bringing together disparate modes of thought rarely creates perfect harmony or total consistency, but it can build a richer intellectual picture and attract a broader audience than a consistent but more limited kind of esotericism, from the point of view of the spectrum of the topics it deals with, be it Ashkenazi or Spanish. The experiential dimension of the use of divine names in early 13th century Ashkenazi literature was no doubt reverberating also in the Catalan and Castilian discussions and practices, though more eminently in Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah.

However, the presence and probably the activity of several Ashkenazi figures in Barcelona must have been, to judge by the scant evidence we have, conspicuously more impressive than the impact of ideas emerging from merely the reading of Ashkenazi esoteric books, or learning them orally, sublime as the topics dealt with may be. In my opinion, encounters with persons who embody a certain way of life, even more so when it is regarded as connected to a special type of religious esoteric discipline, have an impact that may outweigh the theoretical acquaintance with the details of that secret discipline. As we have seen above, Shelomo ben Adret relied on the oral testimonies of persons, probably Ashkenazi, about unusual events that they observed while in Ashkenaz. Moreover, we should note that initiation into the details of the pronunciation of the divine name, as seen in two cases above, adoption of some Ashkenazi customs and attending or being aware of extraordinary performances by Ashkenazi figures left quite strong impressions as described, for example, by Shelomo ben Adret in the context of the event that took place in his father's house.¹¹⁶ This may have been the fact also with regard to the

116 See Shelomo ben Adret's *responsum* I, no. 548. I assume that Baer referred to the campaign of R. Moshe of Cousy and of R. Yonah Gerondi in Castile, but there are not very many esoteric elements of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz in their worldviews. See above note 66.

acquaintance with information about the supernatural powers and performances of persons in the Ashkenazi and French Jewish cultures.¹¹⁷ These are events and impressions that can hardly be evaluated by any modern scholar in an adequate manner. Their experiential valences, inaccessible as they may be for us and to a certain extent imponderable for those medieval figures, were formative for people such as the Kabbalists in Barcelona who were already interested in esotericism and should therefore be kept in mind by the historian, even if it is quite difficult to integrate them precisely when painting a picture of the spiritual landscape as seen by the Kabbalists in Barcelona. The absence of analyses concerning the possible role played by some Ashkenazi components in the common scholarly descriptions of the Kabbalah is quite evident in some of the discussions of this topic and to a great extent also in the descriptions of the religious life of the Jews in Catalonia in the second half of the 13th century in general. The quite general and to a certain extent vague and undocumented statement of Y. Baer about the position of the disciples of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid and R. Ele'azar of Worms who took the side of those conservative camps that strove to reform the religious life in the Peninsula is true only in part and is quite insufficient.¹¹⁸ In fact, I have found very little material dealing with asceticism in either the writings of those Ashkenazi Kabbalists or of Abulafia, who was influenced by Ashkenazi material. While the presence of esoteric elements of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz thought in Sefarad may be easily discerned, as we have seen above, the ascetic components found in *Sefer Ḥasidism* or in the regulations concerning the various acts of penitence are absent in the writings of Barcelonese Kabbalists and so, I assume, also in their practice.¹¹⁹

Why were the Ashkenazi esoterica in demand in Barcelona? There may be several reasons for such a great interest. First, it may be connected to the Ashkenazi concern with the divine name in their literature and especially their use of it in practice in order to achieve extraordinary experiences, sometimes conceived of as prophetic.¹²⁰ This fascination with both the divine names and prophecy is evident in Avraham Abulafia's writings from his earliest works. The affinity between recitation of divine names and the occurrence of an extraordinary experience, documented in Ashkenazi literature, was known also in Barcelona. In the same *responsum* of Shelomo ben Adret, just before the passage that describes the visit of R. Avraham of Cologne, the Barcelonese Kabbalist wrote as follows:

117 Shelomo ben Adret, *ibidem*. See also R. Yitshaq of Acre, who told a story about R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid's extraordinary powers in the name of a certain R. 'Oshayah or Ishaiah, cf. Goldreich ed., *Meirat 'Einayyim*, p. 57.

118 See *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Tel Aviv 1965, p. 144 (Hebrew).

119 On these regulations see Marcus, *Piety and Society*.

120 See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 16–17 and *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 98–99, and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 267–268.

And there are persons who use the [divine] name. And some reliable people told me that they have seen in the land of Ashkenaz a pious man who is preaching in public in the front of the great ones in Torah, wonderful things and sermons that are not done [even] by all the great ones in the land. And he does so by [means of] the name that is called [by them] the “name of the homilist”.¹²¹

This is a very important testimony with regard to both Ashkenaz and Barcelona. Between the two centers of Jewish culture there were intermediaries, those reliable persons who described the use of the special formula for achieving an extraordinary homily. Their testimony is not doubted by Shelomo ben Adret, and he even supports it by telling the story of R. Avraham Axelrod with whom he was acquainted. It is hard to decide who those reliable persons were: Ashkenazi persons who arrived in Barcelona, or other people who made their way to Catalonia from the Ashkenazi provinces, perhaps even Spanish Jews. If the first alternative is accepted, we have some additional evidence of an Ashkenazi presence in Barcelona.

Moreover, this use of the divine name was imagined to be extremely effective, and in the two instances mentioned in the *responsum* the sermons are described as unsurpassed. Let me draw attention to the fact that in both cases Ashkenazi persons were involved and in the case of R. Avraham Axelrod the achievement is described as surpassing whatever was known in Barcelona or Catalonia. It is significant that Shelomo ben Adret describes the Ashkenazi person using the so-called “name of the homilist” as *Ish Kasher*, which I translated as “a pious man”. The main purpose of this epithet is to evaluate this practice as a licit one and to distinguish it from illicit practices related to the use of the divine name, a problem that also haunted Ashkenazi masters at the beginning of the 13th century. Thus, we may assume that Shelomo ben Adret held in high esteem the Ashkenazi masters’ expertise of how to work with divine names for some religiously licit purposes. In this context it is worthwhile to ponder whether the manner in which Shelomo ben Adret speaks about the “name of the homilist” is not in itself revealing. He formulates his comment as follows: “is called [by them] the “name of the homilist””. Should we conclude that this is an Ashkenazi practice unknown to him and that he refers to both a term and a practice that are Ashkenazi and previously unknown in Sefarad?

I doubt if these sermons excelled from the literary point of view. No doubt the Spanish sermons were much more elaborate and literary speaking quite superior to

121 *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. Dimitrovsky, vol. 1, p. 105: ויש מי שמתמש בשם והגידו לי אנשי שם נאמנים שראו בארץ אשכנז איש כשר ודורש ברבים בפני גדולי התורה דברים נפלאים ודרשות לא יעשו כן כל הגדולים אשר בארץ ועושה כן בשם קורין אותו שם הדורש.

anything we know of from Ashkenaz in this genre.¹²² However, given the affinity between R. Avraham Axelrod and the gematria, as seen above, I suspect that the possibility to create new connections on the basis of numerical equivalences left the impression on the Catalan rabbis that has been described above. A perusal of the Ashkenazi literature in manuscript and in print evinces that there was a clear proliferation of Ashkenazi books dealing with numerical speculations. Especially important are those commentaries entitled *Sefer Gematriaot*, one a collection of traditions of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid, the other of his grandson R. Yehudah ha-Darshan. However, there are also many other printed and manuscript commentaries on the Torah replete with gematrias arranged according to the portions of the Pentateuch such as the various versions of the commentary of R. Efrayim ben Shimshon or that attributed to R. Ele'azar of Worms, to mention only the most important ones. Only a part of these found their way to print in the volumes entitled *Tosafot Shalem* by Ya'aqov Gellis, who collected his material from dozens of manuscripts, thereby evincing the richness of this neglected literary genre. The role of these commentaries in Ashkenazi culture can be understood also, though to be sure not exclusively, as handbooks for a preacher who has to deliver sermons on each of these portions. Nothing similar is known in the Spanish kingdoms until the thirties of the 14th century, when the commentary on the Pentateuch of an Ashkenazi rabbi, R. Ya'aqov ben Asher's *Ba'al ha-Turim*, was composed in Toledo.

However, I would like to suggest also a sociological explanation. We may speculate that in a city in which the religious polemic between Christians and Jews was an ongoing experience for more than one generation,¹²³ and controversies with regard to Jewish philosophy constituted a rather permanent intellectual dimension of Jewish life there in the 13th and early 14th centuries, the "stabilizing" image of Ashkenazi Jewish culture would be cherished by some elite figures. Structurally speaking, Catalan Jewish culture, and to a certain extent also Provençal, operating within and shaped by the Andalusian Jewish culture, oriented toward a more philosophical type of thought. On the other hand, the French-Ashkenazi culture was oriented more toward ritual and the frequent use of divine names and consequently emphasized the importance of the Hebrew language. It is important to point out that ideas are sometimes important not only for their content, but also because of the image of the proponents of those ideas and of the general conception of the spiritual status of the community to which they belong.

It may be interesting to point out that while critiques of Maimonides's thought were current in Barcelona, there were many fewer critiques addressed to

122 See Horowitz, *The Jewish Sermon in 14th Century Spain: The Derashot of R. Joshua Ibn Shu'eib*.

123 See Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, Hames, *The Art of Conversion*, and Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, Ithaca 1984.

Ashkenazi culture or masters in writings composed in this city. The single explicit exception is a reference by R. Zerahiah Hen, who compared Nahmanides' critique of the *Guide* to the ignorance of the Ashkenazis, "who have never seen the light".¹²⁴ Another significant exception is a rather veiled one, and it has to do with Avraham Abulafia's polemic against the use of divine names for magical purposes, without mentioning Ashkenaz or any name of an author at all, though they seem to be the main target of the polemic.¹²⁵ Ironically enough, the more stable way of life in Ashkenaz had nothing to do with the emphasis on the dynamic hermeneutic and use of anomian techniques to achieve spiritual experiences, so evident in the testimonies about Ashkenazi culture in early 13th century. In a way, the fixed theosophical code in the Nahmanidean school of Kabbalah, namely the ten *sefirot* as the main scheme providing the framework for symbolic interpretation of any important religious topic, is more stable an exegetical device than the Ashkenazi combinatory esotericism.¹²⁶

An important clarification of the matter addressed in the last paragraph is needed: I did not deal in this framework with what I believe to be pseudepigraphic texts or names of authors that are related to fictitious authors described in the second half of 13th century Kabbalistic literature as Ashkenazi. There are names of fictitious masters¹²⁷ and students of R. Ele'azar of Worms,¹²⁸ an attribution of a Kabbalistic book to him,¹²⁹ a spurious epistle related to an academy in Germaiza, namely Worms,¹³⁰ and otherwise unknown Ashkenazi figures like "R. Ezra ben

124 See Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, p. 265.

125 See Moshe Idel, 'Between Magic of Names and Kabbalah of Names: The Critique of Abraham Abulafia', *Maḥanayyim*, 14 (2003), pp. 79–95 (Hebrew). Compare also to the testimony of R. Baḥya that he had seen magicians operating with divine names, probably in Barcelona. See above note 76.

126 For the system of ten *sefirot* as a fixed exegetical code see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 280–289.

127 Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 356.

128 Ibidem, p. 359.

129 See the book *Sefer ha-Yihud*, written by an anonymous author from the circle of *Sefer ha-'Iyun*, Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 488, fols. 14a-17a that has been attributed to R. Ele'azar. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 256. This book has been quoted as such by a Spanish Kabbalist after the expulsion from Spain. See the introduction to R. Avraham Adroitel's *Sefer 'Avnei Zikkaron*.

130 See Idel, 'The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of 'Arayyot in Early Kabbalah', p. 152, and Mark Verman, *The Book of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*, Albany 1992, p. 174 note 27. Joseph Dan, in 'The Kabbalistic Book *Baddei ha-Aron* and Kabbalistic Pseudepigraphy in Thirteenth Century', in J. Dan and J. Hacker eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 111–137 (Hebrew) claimed that it was R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon who fabricated a theosophical epistle attributed to masters

Shelomo of Germany”.¹³¹ The fabrications related to the name of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid did not concern me above.¹³² The Kabbalistic literature connected to *Sefer ha-Iyun*, although it contains references to Ashkenazi authors and reveals a great interest in issues related to the divine names, has not been included in our survey either, since I assume that this literature was not composed in Barcelona and was scarcely influential there.¹³³ My discussions above have dealt with explicit

in Worms, while he was living in Safed around 1325. However, this claim ignores the presence of this epistle in Sefarad, as we learn from the citation of it by the early 15th century Castilian Kabbalist R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov. The entire issue requires a separate investigation. This forgery reflects, as Scholem has already pointed out, the *imaginaire* of Kabbalists in Castile in the sixties of the 13th century. See his *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 355ff and Boaz Huss, ‘*Sefer Poqeah ’Ivrim* — New Information on the History of Kabbalistic Literature’, *Tarbiz*, 61 (1992), pp. 501–502 and note 84 (Hebrew).

- 131 Scholem, *ibidem*, p. 362 note 317. I cannot enter here into a discussion of the relatively late legend of R. Ele’azar of Worms as the teacher of Nahmanides in matters of esotericism. See Joseph Dan, ‘An Investigation into the ’Aggadot about R. Eleazar of Worms’, *Sinai*, 74 (1994), pp. 171–174 (Hebrew), M. Idel, ‘Shelomo Molkho as Magician’, *Sefunot*, ed. Joseph Hacker, [NS] 3 (1985), p. 200 note 46 (Hebrew), Abrams, ‘The Literary Emergence’, p. 83 note 47, Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, p. 268 note 341 and Verman-Adler, ‘Path Jumping in the Jewish Magical Tradition’, p. 137 note 13. I wonder to what extent this attempt is related to the appearance of R. Ele’azar’s name in the circle of the disciples of Nahmanides’ Kabbalah, which has been mentioned above.
- 132 For a detailed analysis of pseudepigraphy pertinent to our analysis here see Ephraim Kanarfogel, ‘Rabbinic figures in Castilian Kabbalistic Pseudepigraphy; R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid and R. Elhanan of Corbeil’, *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy* 3,1 (1993), pp. 77–109.
- 133 Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 309–364, and Verman, *The Book of Contemplation, Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*, pp. 199–201, 205–208. R. Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi was not the only Kabbalist who visited Barcelona and was acquainted with this literature. R. Baḥya ben Asher, for example, also was acquainted with a view found in this literature. See Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah of R. Baḥya*, p. 147. However, the question is whether they became acquainted with this literature while they were in the city or only later on in their careers. *En passant*: the tentative dating of the beginning of R. Yosef’s activity, namely the late sixties of the 13th century, or of his presence in Barcelona at that time, as substantially earlier than commonly believed, may also lead to the redating of the literature of the circle of the *Book of ’Iyun* as earlier than previously thought. Interestingly enough, the anonymous Kabbalist somewhere in Catalonia who wrote the commentary on the prayer which uses concentric circles and colors, was also acquainted with a quote from the *’Iyun* literature. See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 117–118. Some form of acquaintance with this literature may also be discerned in Avraham Abulafia, but it is less conspicuous than in the writings of the aforementioned Kabbalists.

traditions and relatively clear images regarding Ashkenazi masters which were reported by *bone fide*, historical Kabbalists and not as part of premeditated or unconscious forgeries.

However, let me be clear: even false attributions like those mentioned above may reflect something significant about the status that some Ashkenazi masters enjoyed in 13th century Sefarad. Those figments of religious imagination had their impact too. As an interesting philosopher once said: “Imagination is probably the greatest force acting on our feelings ... only a small part of reality, for a human being is what actually is going on”.¹³⁴ Experiential moments related to performative events like initiation rituals or techniques that found their way from Ashkenaz to Catalonia work not only on the intellectual parts of a person, as a precious piece of religious information, but also on imagination and feelings. The kind of *imaginaire* among indigenous Jews concerning the Ashkenazi masters who visited Catalonia in the 13th century, something combining the “other” and the “brother” at the same time, still needs a special inquiry.

However, my point here is that beyond some Spanish forms of *imaginaire* regarding elite Ashkenazi masters which expressed itself also in inventions and forgeries, or perhaps parallel to them from the temporal point of view, there is also solid evidence dealing with what “actually was going on” in Barcelona. By putting together all these testimonies — or at least those that I am acquainted with — and by analyzing them I see the prospect of a better understanding of some neglected aspects of the most important phase in the development of Kabbalah in Catalonia.¹³⁵

134 See Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophical Sketches: A Study of the Human Mind in Relation to Feeling*, New York 1964, p. 125.

135 An issue that is not integral to the framework of this study is the possible impact on occultist Jewish thinkers in Castile from Islamic esotericism, stemming from Ismailiyya, such as the science of the letters or the combinations of letters, or even from philosophical writings, such as, for example, commentaries on the alphabet. This influence might have subsequently contributed to the Castilian Kabbalah, as it is the case of *Midrash Hokhmah* of R. Yehudah ben Shelomo ha-Kohen ibn Matka of Toledo, a mid-13th century comprehensive compendium of sciences and religious topics. See, e.g., Colette Sirat, ‘Juda b. Salomon Ha-Cohen: philosophe, astronome et peut-être Kabbaliste de la première moitié du XIII^e siècle’, *Italia* I, 2 (1978), pp. 39–61, especially pp. 48–49, and idem, ‘La Kabbale d’après Juda ben Salomon ha-Cohen’, Gérard Nahon et Charles Touati eds., *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, Louvain 1980, pp. 191–202. This book was known to Avraham Abulafia when he was in Sicily in the late eighties of the 13th century and to R. Bahya, who copied lengthy quotes in his Commentary on the Pentateuch. See David Goldstein, ‘The Citations of Judah ben Solomon ha-Cohen in the Commentary on Genesis of Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher’, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26 (1975), pp. 105–112. This book should be studied in the

Having said this, let me now repeat the more general conclusion to which the examination of the penetration of Ashkenazi themes and practices has led me: given the strength and the stability of the theosophical structures that informed the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists in Catalonia, and of the Maimonidean or Neoplatonic theologies found in ecstatic Kabbalah, they were only marginally affected by the appropriation of the Ashkenazi material. Though they imagined these Ashkenazi types of esoterica to be sublime, Nahmanides' followers did not change their theosophy because of the Ashkenazi traditions nor did the Maimonidean cosmology or psychology undergo main changes when adapted into these Kabbalistic systems. The Ashkenazi material has been in some cases indeed superimposed or mixed with other systems, as it is the case of Abulafia's exegetical system and of Yosef Ashkenazi's theory of combination of letters that is considered to be as important as the theosophical system. However, in the Kabbalistic commentaries on the secrets of the Torah written by Nahmanides' followers, the Ashkenazi traditions have been basically put on a pedestal. These two components, different as they are phenomenologically speaking and also from the geographical point of view, nevertheless coexisted in a state of moderate tension in the Kabbalistic literature in Sefarad and elsewhere, and also in the more modest blends that emerged in the Ashkenazi communities.

I hope that the above analyses are not perceived of as an attempt to offer a hidden or an implicit criticism of Shelomo ben Adret or of other Jewish elites in Barcelona or to accuse them of obsession with stability or inertia, just as I did not attempt to praise Kabbalists active in Toledo or in Sicily for their innovative types of Kabbalah. The two vectors of spiritual inertia or stability and of innovation are both natural parts of human and also of religious life, and it would be better for scholars trying to understand such complex phenomena not to take sides in medieval disputes. The romantic distinction between the original genius or the authentic creator versus the inertial tradition is a poor guide for understanding the complexity of religious life and especially Kabbalah. In many cases transmission, faithful as it may be, is creative by the very fact that it is an event taking place in new circumstances.

context of the existence of other channels of transmission of linguistic secrets from the Muslim world to Kabbalah.